ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

JULY 7

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VOLUME 196 CONTENTS FOR JULY 7, 1928 NUMBER 2

SERIALS

Two-Gun Magic Three Parts. Part I . . . . Donald Bayne Hobart 188
The Whistling Waddy goes gunning

World Brigands Six Parts. Part II . . . . . Fred MacIsaac 217
Europe against the United States in 1940

Now We're Rich Five Parts. Part IV . . . . . Edgar Franklin 242
What happens when a family scents money

Heartbreak Trail Three Parts. Part III . . . Author of "Eyes West!" 263
When strong men fought and bled in Kansas

COMPLETE STORIES

"You've Killed Privacy!" Novelette . . . . . Garret Smith 145
When science locks horns with crime

Fair Exchange Short Story . . . . . Eric Heath 210
An experienced banker bucks a tough game

Fifteen Minutes of Fate Short Story . . . . Frank Dorrance Hopley 237
Gambling with death in a swamp

Ask Him Another Short Story . . . . . John H. Thompson 259
An old circus man in the news game

OTHER FEATURES

The Hate of Attila . . . . . Guy Rader 216
Wild Horse Industry . . . . . Harold J. Ashe 241
Early Playing Cards . . . . . Arthur Neale 262
Argonotes 285
Looking Ahead! 288

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Ads

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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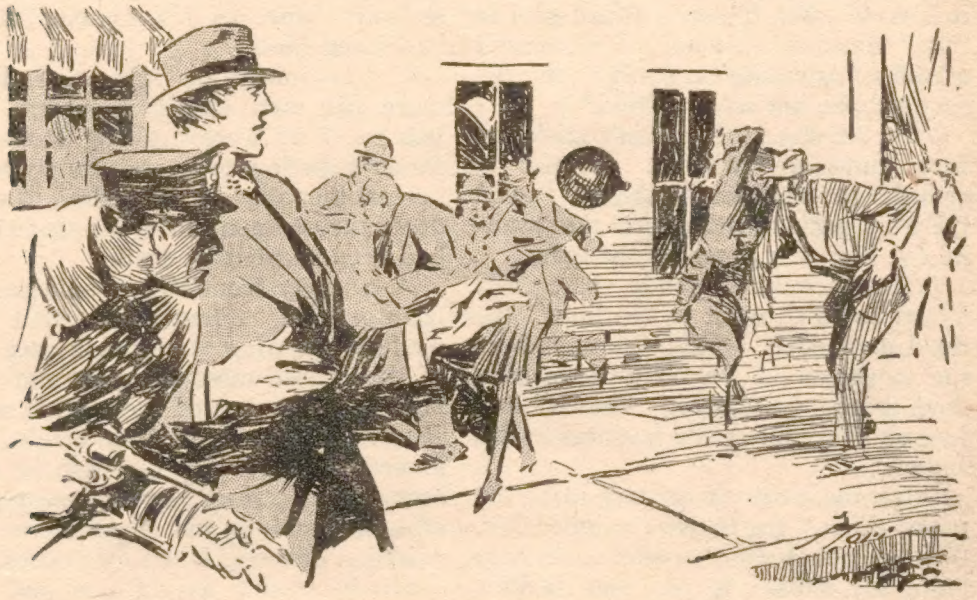


"You've Killed Privacy!"

The revolt against the extension of television by crooks to whom it means "restraint of trade."

By GARRET SMITH

Author of "On the Brink of 2000," "Slaves of the Wire," etc.

Novelette—Complete

TENSE excitement and anxiety buzzed below stairs in the old Ward mansion this morning. From maids to housekeeper and butler, the servants' early breakfast was neglected in favor of the lurid headlines on the front page of the morning paper.

The buzzer connected with the master's suite on the second floor broke in sharply upon this preoccupation. Whitley, the valet, dropped his paper and hurried to answer the call. Mrs. Meanes, the housekeeper, shuddered.

"Gives me a start every time Mr. Edison rings, just like his father, short, sharp an' commandin'. It seems like old Mr. Ward was still alive. Don't seem possible it's two weeks to-day

since he passed away, an' everything goin' on just as usual—till this awful thing happened."

"You don't suppose he'll dare go out this morning?" one of the maids whispered.

"Dare!" snorted the butler, "Mr. Edison Ward isn't the kind to let a murderin' lunatic scare him. I remember when we got word of his football accident at college, ten years ago it is now. Mr. Thomas Ward said to me: 'Haskins, that boy of mine isn't afraid of anything on earth. Shy before people, but never afraid.'"

"I'd be shy if I couldn't stick my face outdoors without drawin' a crowd," the chauffeur spoke up. "And there's a pack of newspaper men waitin' for him now down by the gate."

"How could anybody hate Mr. Ward so as to want to kill him?" the maid demanded. "Why, it says here the workmen in his plants love him. And it says he's already showed he's just as able to run the business as his father."

"It's the work of a crazy man, the police think," the butler reminded her. "Nobody that wasn't crazy could help liking Mr. Edison Ward," and Haskins returned to the reading of the newspaper account, headed:

MURDER THREAT TO EDISON WARD

New Head of International Radio Corporation Gets Anonymous Note of Warning

Girl Secretary Intercepts It—Summons Police

Again a buzzer interrupted, this time from the breakfast room, and the butler hurried in to wait on his master. Edison Ward stood by the window reading his paper.

"Good morning, Haskins," the young man greeted him, tossing the paper on the floor with an irritable gesture. "Suppose you've seen this rot in the paper?"

"Yes, sir. I saw it, but dare say it's all paper talk. Very annoying, sir!"

"Annoying is right! Don't ever get yourself well known, Haskins. It's plain hell."

Edison Ward dropped into the nearer of the two chairs at the little breakfast table. He stared with an inscrutable face at the opposite seat, from which for so many years the stalwart figure of his famous father had faced him.

Unconsciously he squared a little more his own sturdy shoulders. It was as if he were drawing from his father's shadow presence new strength for another day of the ordeal so suddenly thrust upon him when that chair had been vacated by death.

A stranger from Mars would hardly have guessed, at first glance, that this modest-appearing young man was one of the richest, most powerful and just now most famous of the earth's sons. He was well above medium height, but looked less owing to the flesh he had accumulated since he dropped his athletics, and to the slight stoop acquired at desk and laboratory bench.

His increasing weight also gave his face a chubbiness that belied a good half dozen of his thirty-two years.

But only to a man from Mars or some other equally remote world would that face be unfamiliar. It was a countenance readily noticed and not easily forgotten.

A pair of remarkably keen and handsome blue eyes were the dominant feature. Even in photographs those eyes, under striking black brows, were unforgetable. Added to them were a high forehead, a finely chiseled nose, a sensitive mouth and a firm chin.

But, as if fate had been dissatisfied with nature's identification marks, the football accident of college days had left a long narrow scar running diagonally across his left cheek and ending at the bridge of his nose.

Edison Ward, in his modest sen-

sitiveness, imagined this scar was more of a disfigurement than it really was. His consciousness of it, added to natural shyness, made him hate and fear public notice as much as his father had loved it.

For it was the irony of fate that the man who was one of the greatest publicity geniuses of America should have a son who morbidly loathed it.

As the constant companion of his famous father, Edison Ward, ever since he could remember, had been compelled to expose his face to the public from the pages of magazines and newspapers and from the silver screen, until that man or woman was benighted indeed who did not know him on sight.

Now that new device, the televisor for broadcasting moving pictures, perfected and now about to be made generally available by his father, had added to the white glare of publicity.

Edison Ward could not remember when he had been able to go anywhere outside the none too certain privacy of his father's home without being recognized and followed by curious crowds. And he hated and dreaded it with all the strength of his intense and sensitive nature.

It had been bad enough when he was only the secondary figure in the spotlight. Then, as his own inventive genius began to develop, he shared more and more in the direct public applause.

His father's death had left him standing alone in the center of the illumination. Now this wild threat of a madman had redoubled the glare.

It was the glare rather than the physical danger that he dreaded this morning as he finished his hasty breakfast.

But Haskins had judged rightly that Edison Ward had no intention of deviating from his regular routine, even though sudden death might be lurking in the very grounds outside his door.

He went out and entered his car as usual, without so much as an anxious glance around him. The car rolled down to the gate and paused while an assistant gardener opened it.

In the suburban avenue beyond the gate a police officer was making a vain attempt to keep the crowd moving. A half dozen reporters made a dash for the car, but were herded back by a special officer who had a motor cycle standing at the curb.

The officer touched his hat respectfully.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "The chief told me to run out and see that you got to your office safe. I think you'd better let me ride with you."

"Thanks, officer," Ward told him, "but it's entirely unnecessary, and I'd rather you didn't. I prefer to attract as little attention as possible."

"Then I'll have to ride beside your car. That's orders," the officer insisted.

"I can't help that," Ward told him, a little ungraciously.

And so the Ward machine started off down the street with the police motor cycle chugging along close to the left running board and a growing crowd watching from the sidewalk as they neared the down town section. When the car drew up in front of the big building which housed the main offices of the Radio Corporation the throng all but blocked traffic.

Edison Ward alighted nimbly as the motor cycle officer dismounted and stepped to his side. The patrolman on the beat began clearing a lane through the crowd.

Just as Ward put his foot on the curb, a shabby, wild-eyed man ducked under the arm of the harassed patrolman and darted toward Ward.

A rod away, one grimy hand came out from under his flapping coat and poised above his head. A gasp ran through the crowd.

In the wild man's hand was a round, black object the size of an old-

fashioned cannon ball. The officer gave a cry of warning and threw himself in front of Ward as a protecting shield, at the same time reaching for the gun in his holster.

In a flash Edison Ward's hands grasped the shoulders of the policeman and hurled him to one side out of harm's way. And at the same instant, with Ward as a clear target, the fellow threw the bomb.

Edison Ward, in that breath-taking moment, was back on the fooball field, intercepting a kick at close range. Instinctively he crouched and held his hands in position.

At the same time his quick mind was working with the fact that instead of a light pigskin spheroid, he was catching a metal ball presumably packed with a high explosive that needed only a slight jar to release its deadly force.

As the black sphere touched his hands, he jerked them swiftly back, easing the shock, but at the same time getting a tight clutch on the missle. The next instant the bomb was resting in the well-cushioned pit of his stomach.

There was a hushed moment while the crowd stood breathless, waiting. But no thunder of explosion smote the air. Then the motor cycle officer leaped forward and felled the would-be assassin with a blow from his gun butt.

The patrolman relieved Ward of the bomb and gingerly carried it off, the suddenly panic-stricken crowd scattering before him.

As the officer dragged the madman into the vestibule of the building, the fellow recovered his senses, struggled to his feet and seeing Ward following closely, made an abortive lunge at him.

"We'll get you yet, damn you!" he shrieked. "You've killed privacy! You and that devil of a father of yours, with your infernal inventions that see and hear through walls."

"Be gentle with him, officer," Ward admonished his guard. "He's quite mad and irresponsible, but at that I rather sympathize with him."

And Edison Ward passed on to the elevator.

When they dissected the bomb at police headquarters, they found in the black shell enough TNT to have killed the entire crowd.

II.

In his private suite of offices on the top floor, Edison Ward found the same tense atmosphere that had pervaded his home. A belated stenographer had been in the crowd below and had beaten her chief up the elevator with a report of this sensational climax to the news story of the morning.

Pete, the colored factotum who presided in the anteroom, was visibly trembling when he swung open the door and stared at Ward pop-eyed, for once speechless. A group of excited girls, who had slipped into the anteroom to hear the news, fell silent as he passed through into a private passage leading into his own office, but not too soon for Ward to overhear the awe-struck words—"bravest thing I ever heard of."

Edison Ward blushed with mingled embarrassment and annoyance and was conscious of a feeling of intense relief when he found himself alone in the big office occupied for so many years by his father. Again he felt strengthened by the sense of his father's presence.

He turned at once to the correspondence that was waiting for him, but was interrupted almost immediately by the telephone.

"Morehouse speaking, Mr. Ward. May I come in for a minute?"

"Yes," the young man agreed grudgingly.

He not only wanted to be alone, but Morehouse was one of the men he particularly did not care to see that morning. Morehouse had been secretary to the president of the corporation during the elder Ward's regime and was still acting in that capacity to the son.

But Edison Ward neither liked nor

trusted him, although he was not able to tell exactly why. He, with Vice President Coddington and J. K. Wainwright, chairman of the board of directors, formed a triumvirate, who held the power of attorney to direct the affairs of the corporation in the president's absence.

This was the nearest that the elder Ward had ever come to delegating his authority in the International Radio Corporation, of which he had been the majority stockholder and absolute czar, an autocratic rulership which he had handed on to his son, Edison, in his will.

But Morehouse, as usual, was suavely deferential, and expressed the greatest concern over the nearly tragic incident of the morning.

"It seems to me, Mr. Ward," he said, "if I may be allowed to suggest, that it would be wise for you to keep out of sight for the time being, until we can be sure that there is no danger of a further attack. Why don't you go away into retirement for a little time. A rest would do you good after the strain you have been through, and you can be assured that the affairs of the corporation are in competent hands."

"I should say that this was just the time that I need to be on the job," Ward told him shortly. "I'm afraid I can't consider any other course, until I've got things better in hand."

"I think you can trust Mr. Wainwright and myself to see that your policies are carried out," Morehouse replied, a bit stiffly. "Of course, Mr. Wainwright is ill at present, but I can count upon him agreeing to anything that is for the good of the corporation."

"Why do you leave Vice President Coddington out of it?" Ward asked, eying the secretary sharply.

"Well, as a matter of fact," Morehouse began uneasily, "now that you ask me that way, I'd like to warn you to not be too trustful of Mr. Coddington. I have no proof of my feeling, but I am inclined to suspect Mr. Coddington of aiming to get control of the corporation himself."

Edison Ward studied his informant closely, his face showing no surprise. He had suspected something of the sort himself, but had been inclined to believe that Morehouse was in the conspiracy.

"That is a serious charge, Mr. Morehouse," he said after a moment's thought. "If you find any absolute evidence to support it, I would appreciate your telling me, but I don't care to consider mere vague suspicions."

Morehouse had barely departed when Vice President Coddington presented himself. He had just heard of the fanatic's attack, and came in to inquire about it.

Coddington was a considerably older man than Morehouse, and over twenty years Edison Ward's senior. His attitude toward his old chief's son was rather paternal, in spite of the young man's new authority.

"Now look here, Edison," he told him. "I'm going to advise you just as your father would were he alive. There is no need of your sticking around here at present, now that you have completed your work on the new televisor and the plans are under way for reorganizing the factory to produce it. I suggest that you run away for a few weeks or months if you feel like it and have a play spell. You can turn over your televisor process to me and I'll see to having it patented. For the sake of the company you shouldn't risk your life needlessly. No one but you knows the essential secret of the new televisor."

"Mr. Morehouse has just made a similar suggestion," Ward said dryly, and turned to his work.

He had no intention of revealing that priceless secret to any one till it was a proved success and could be properly protected.

But Edison Ward found it difficult

to concentrate on the documents before him, and it was over an hour before he was ready for his morning's dictation. At his ring, Marian Lord, the private secretary he had inherited from his father, came in, notebook in hand.

Edison Ward's pulse accelerated sharply, as it always did when he looked at Marian Lord. He had been secretly in love with Marian ever since she came to the corporation. Now he was nearer to betraying his feelings than at any time during those three years of stern repression.

He sprang to his feet and held out his hand.

"Miss Lord," he exclaimed, "I confess I was a little irritated last night when the police called me up and told me you had intercepted a note from this madman and sent it to police headquarters without informing me. But when the officer told me this morning that the man called in person last evening when there was no one around the office but myself and you, and that you sent him away, I felt differently, particularly in view of what happened later and the fact that I and many others might have lost our lives if the police had not been on hand. I wouldn't have let that note go to the police if I had known. I probably owe my life to you, and I want to thank you."

His painful shyness always made Edison Ward gruff and awkward when he addressed Miss Lord. He was particularly so now.

The girl blushed and drew her hand away rather hastily.

"You've nothing to thank me for," she assured him. "You seem to have been quite able to save your own life. I can't tell you how much I admire what you did this morning. Of course, I knew you wouldn't let the police know, if I had consulted you last night. And it really took no courage to send him away. He seemed perfectly harmless until after he had gone and I'd read his note. I just made him believe you weren't there."

Edison Ward regarded the girl in silence. If he'd been a mere poor employee in the corporation he would long ago have asked Marian Lord to be his wife.

But two things had prevented him: His worldly-wise father had always warned him against fortune hunting females and he was always haunted by the fear that if he asked the girl for her hand and she accepted, he would never be sure that she would take him for himself alone. But greater than that objection was the devil of publicity that haunted his days.

He could not imagine asking a sensitive girl like Marian Lord to suffer it with him. Moreover, he had never seen any signs that she shared his feelings.

"What would you advise me to do, Miss Lord?" he asked abruptly.

She regarded him coolly for a moment.

"Do?" she asked. "Why, do just what you've been doing. Stick right on the job, and show the world you're not afraid of anything."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad to hear you say that. Two other members of our staff have just advised me to go away and hide."

"Mr. Coddington and Mr. Morehouse, I suppose."

"You've guessed it," he laughed. "What do you think of those two?"

"I don't think you should ask me that question, Mr. Ward," the girl told him evenly. "As long as I'm working here, I don't care to act as a spy, if I may be permitted to say so."

"You're right, and I beg your pardon," he told her, greatly embarrassed. "It's my job to find out those things for myself, and I'm going to do it. Take some letters, please," returning to a strictly businesslike manner.

"A. G. Sax & Co., Industrial Engineers, New York. Attention Mr. A. G. Sax," he dictated among other letters. "My dear sir: Pursuant to our correspondence and recent personal interview, I have given your figures

careful consideration and shall be glad to have you send on the men you recommend to conduct a comprehensive survey of our plant with a view to changing one of them over for quantity production of televisors. Yours very truly."

In making this arrangement, Edison Ward was carrying out a policy repeatedly practiced by his father in the frequent enlargements of the rapidly growing corporation, but he hoped himself to obtain further results. He'd been acutely conscious during the last two weeks of a certain bafflement in every direction as he went about the offices and plant of the corporation, endeavoring to get a complete inside grasp of a situation that seemed just beyond his control.

While Edison Ward had been in close touch with his father in all the general aspects of the management, he had been primarily a laboratory man. Now when he sought more detailed information, he was getting only formal, carefully prepared reports from department heads.

Everywhere he was conscious of a conspiracy of silence under the outward deference that he was paid.

The letters finished, Marian Lord started to go.

"You wanted me to remind you that you were to prepare your radio talk to-day," she said.

Edison Ward's heart went cold within him. This was another legacy of his publicity loving father.

Once a week for years the elder Ward had given one of his famous radio talks to a listening world, keeping them informed not only of the kaleidoscopic change in his great organization, but giving weekly reviews of economic conditions the world over in simple language that made them universally popular.

It was considered essential to the policy of the company that these talks be continued by the new head of the corporation. The one scheduled for to-morrow evening was to be the first since his father's death, and would be Edison Ward's début before a radio audience.

"Very well," he told his secretary dully. "I'll go at that this afternoon."

"Was there anything else?"

"No, unless you'll do that confounded talk for me," he told her, with a wry laugh.

"Why so?" she asked.

"I tried broadcasting once, a couple of years ago, and I flunked out on the first sentence. You can't imagine how distressing it is if you haven't tried it, to get up before that devilish little microphone and realize that something like a hundred million people, more or less, are listening to you, and you can't see them, and don't know how they are taking it, but you feel every one of them staring at your very soul."

III.

Edison Ward went to luncheon alone that noon as usual—that is, if being attended by a cheering crowd of several hundred of his fellow townsmen could be called "alone." He glanced wistfully at the closed door of Marian Lord's little office as he started. Many times in the last three years he had been tempted to ask Marian to have luncheon with him. It would be a particularly great comfort to-day. But he suppressed the impulse with a little shudder.

His late father would have frowned on such social contact with a mere office secretary as "infra dig." He was quite certain, too, that the worldly wise and prudent Marian would have viewed it from that angle.

She would doubtless refuse such an invitation. But these considerations weighed little in preventing him from pressing his personal attentions on Marian. He hardly gave them a conscious thought. The real overwhelming reason was that devil of publicity again.

He recalled one occasion early in their acquaintance when she had happened to go down in the elevator with him at noon. At the building exit he had obeyed a sudden impulse and turned to her to suggest that she go to luncheon with him.

But the impulse died as he saw her shrink back before he could speak. Indeed, she had not been looking at him, but at the crowd that had begun to gather as soon as his well-known face appeared in the doorway.

With some incoherent excuse she had turned back into the building. Ever since then she had avoided even so much as appearing in the elevator with him. Rather discouraging to a possible courtship.

Imagine making love with all the world looking on, a honeymoon in the center of a spotlight! This was the incongruous thought that tormented him as he went down in the elevator.

In the lobby where he had last seen his mad assailant there occurred to him another reason why it would have been unwise to ask Marian to accompany him. Suppose this would-be assassin had a pal who would seek to carry out the other's thwarted attempt! Or suppose some other lunatic should be inspired by the fellow's example! He had no right to expose any one else to his peril.

Ward resisted the temptation to go to the company restaurant in the basement, where he would suffer a minimum of public exposure. He had a boyish dread of appearing in any way disturbed by the incident of the morning.

Commonly he lunched at a downtown club of which he was a member. He vetoed this also to-day. There he would have to talk to many people he knew. He chose rather the dining room of the Hotel Flourette, the most popular better-class eating place in town, and proceeded there on foot, his progress impeded by staring throngs.

A crowd seemed to spring up as if by magic around the entrance of the hotel even before he reached it. A whisper ran through the lobby ahead of him and into the big dining room.

Every eye was upon him as he entered and, as luck would have it, was ushered to one of the few remaining vacant tables near the front windows. He ate with a wall of faces pressed against the glass. In a twinkling a crowd had blocked the sidewalk and overflowed to the middle of the street.

Edison Ward tried his best to appear unhurried and unconcerned. But worse yet was to follow.

At the far end of the dining room was a canvas screen and beside it the omnipresent horn of a radio outfit, regular fixtures of the hotel, which, being an up-to-date hostelry, entertained its patrons with radio and news reel reports of current events while they dined. And the current event of prime importance to-day was the lunatic's assault upon Edison Ward.

The unhappy man was obliged to sit and listen to a detailed rehash of his trying experience and to hear himself glowingly eulogized as a fearless hero, while his fellow diners stared at him brazenly.

Then when he congratulated himself that the topic was exhausted, the light flashed on the screen, and to his surprise the whole episode of his attack was enacted in pictures. One of the enterprising news men who had followed him that morning had evidently packed along a small motion-picture camera.

But the victim's own interest was suddenly aroused acutely. At the end of the picture account a close-up of the bomb thrower was thrown on the screen.

For the first time Ward had an opportunity to study the fellow's face calmly. This picture had been taken after the prisoner's removal to police headquarters, and the features were no longer distorted and working with passion.

The eyes were piercing, intent, and highly intelligent, in spite of the light of madness in their depths. The countenance was that of a man of breeding, the æsthetic lineaments of a scholar and dreamer. This was no mere thug.

Ward was particularly interested in the fellow's statement at headquarters, transmitted by dictograph to a phonograph disk and so put on the radio. The man's voice, free from the hoarse frenzy of the morning, was well modulated and his phraseology was cultured.

"I have nothing to say," he stated, "except that I represent a secret brotherhood sworn to destroy the enemies of privacy. You may imprison me if you wish, but my work will go on. My name is John Yosoff, and I am a graduate student in philosophy at Midland University. That is all."

The man's identity had been verified, and the authorities at the university stated that Yosoff had acted queerly ever since a severe illness a year ago and had been absent from his lectures for days at a time without explanation. The police were inclined to scout his statement about the secret brotherhood, but were searching for any clews that might unearth such a sinister conspiracy.

Edison Ward returned to his office a little more impressed with the possible seriousness of the affair. But he was too annoyed on the street to think clearly. Pausing to wait for traffic at a corner, he heard a radio blaring over his head above the entrance to a radio supply store.

"Edison Ward has just left the Hotel Flourette and is on his way back to his office, apparently unguarded, but it is understood that he is being followed closely by plainclothes men from headquarters assigned to guard him without consulting his wishes," roared the radio.

Bystanders looked at the subject of this broadcasting, and grinned. Ward started on in even greater disgust. This was certainly keeping publicity right up to the minute.

He looked about for the unsought police guardians, but was unable to pick them from the crowd. Well, he had demonstrated his courage. He would not walk the public streets again right away.

He was almost tempted to follow the advice of Morehouse and Coddington and go into hiding till public curiosity subsided. Perhaps his associates meant well toward him, after all.

And yet as he reëntered his office it was with a feeling that he was surrounded by those whom he could not trust—all excepting Marian Lord. Without any tangible reason at all he felt sure of her fidelity, although he dared hope for no stronger feeling.

He had intended to dictate his radio speech to Marian that afternoon, but when it came to the point shyness restrained him from talking even before so small and sympathetic an audience. He chose to address the dictophone instead. Even then his imagination pictured that distant radio audience and at times made him fumble his sentences.

One cylinder had been filled with a halting first draft of the fore part of his speech, and he was replacing it with a fresh cylinder, when a sudden thought struck him. He stood for a long minute with the cylinder poised over the machine, then chuckled lightheartedly and slipped it into place.

From then on his dictation went smoothly. He was no longer haunted by a vision of his radio audience. By the middle of the afternoon the first draft was finished and the cylinders turned over to Marian Lord to transcribe.

"I'll make the final draft in the morning," he told her. "I'm going home early to-day. You can reach me in my study at home if I'm needed before the office closes. If any more bombers call, send them out to the house with a camera man."

He left her with a whimsical grin meant to conceal his true state of mind.

At home Ward shut himself up in his private suite which included a well equipped laboratory. It had been used jointly by him and his father. Now it was never entered, excepting by himself and his valet. From the radio transmitter here he would broadcast his speech to-morrow evening.

He had his dinner sent up to him that night, and did not retire till long after midnight.

All the radio world was waiting for this first speech of the new head of the International Company. The fact that it was his first speech was enough to guarantee general interest.

It was augmented by expectation that he would make some important revelations regarding the long awaited new model televisor at a popular price. And then this spectacular threat of death and his heroic act had swelled the universal eagerness to hear his voice, almost to an epidemic frenzy.

But Edison Ward slept calmly that night, the whole matter dismissed from his mind, though a few hours before he had expected this to be like the last attempt to sleep before execution. He spent the forenoon reading his speech before a stop watch in the privacy of his office and cutting it into the prescribed limit of fifteen minutes allowed for delivery. That done, he devoted himself to other matters for the rest of the day.

The afternoon papers played up his coming speech with big heads, and added speculations on its nature as if this brief announcement of his were the annual message of the President of the United States.

And so, a little before nine o'clock, Eastern Standard Time, U. S. A., the vast audience of radio fans the world over sat down at their radios to hear about this latest marvel of scientific inventive genius that was about to be placed in the hands of all, even the poorest—to complete the annihilation of distance and—as the lunatic bomb thrower had said—of privacy.

The hour was most convenient for some, who could enjoy this thrill with their coffee after dinner. In the theaters plays were to be suspended briefly for the satisfaction of their audiences. But as the radio waves progressed around the globe through the successive time belts, it meant that millions of listeners in were kept up after midnight. In millions of other homes they arose long before daybreak, while millions of others prepared to enjoy Ward's speech with their dinners, and for many more millions it broke in on their day's business.

In the Ward home was not the least enthusiastic part of his audience. The servant staff were gathered in their own dining room before their own radio as the only means of hearing their master's voice from the floor above.

But Haskins, the butler, and Whitley, the valet, were perched at the head of the back stairs, where they could hear the radio and at the same time keep their eyes on the door to Ward's suite.

Haskins had privately kept his eye as closely as possible on his master while he was in the house, ever since he heard of the death threat. He suffered a morbid fear that somehow a lunatic might break into Ward's presence even in the privacy of his home.

As a further precaution, the gardener and assistant were taking turns patrolling the grounds, particularly under the windows opening off young Ward's suite.

At length the voice of the announcer introduced Edison Ward in brief but flowery terms. Then came Mr. Ward's voice, so familiar to his household, though heard for the first time by most of his great audience. There was no trace of hesitation or embarrassment in his smooth-flowing salutation to his far-flung hearers.

"It gives me great pleasure to inform you," he went on after his brief introduction, "that in a little over a year from now you who to-night sit listening to a bodiless voice will be able to remain in your homes in comfort as you are to-night, and yet not only listen to the voice of a speaker who may be thousands of miles away, but be able to watch his face and his every gesture as well.

"You will sit by your own hearths and hear and see plays and operas in distant cities. You will be able to watch spectacular news events while they are taking place. The costly and cumbersome scientific toy of to-day, with its slow and costly transmission of pictures, will be within every one's reach. In that day—"

"Liar!" a harsh voice interrupted. "In that day you will have been a year in hell!"

And millions of listeners, the world over, gasped and held their breaths. Then their eardrums were smitten by a thunderous explosion, followed by a piercing scream, then silence.

IV.

It was literally a shot heard round the world, to reapply Longfellow's famous phrase. Probably in all the nations of the earth to which civilization had brought the telegraph and the radio there was hardly one human being who had not heard of the madman's spectacular attack on Edison Ward two days before.

It was uppermost in the minds of every one who listened to the opening sentences of this first speech from the new industrial emperor.

When that speech was interrupted by this ominous detonation, followed by a cry as of a man in mortal agony, the entire radio world jumped to the same conclusion—a second mad bomb thrower had succeeded where the first had failed.

There was a world-wide holding of breath, then long moments of suspense while the colossal audience awaited for some words of reassurance.

This shy young man whose face had been so familiar in connection with his noted father for the last ten years had always been liked by the great Ward public. With the event of two days ago and his heroic reaction to it, he had suddenly become a universally popular idol.

At this intimation of their hero's tragic fate thousands of sensitive women fainted. Strong men turned pale and tremulous. Nearly twoscore of deaths from heart failure as a result of the shock were reported later.

In the servants' quarters of the Ward home there was sudden panic. The screams of the women echoed the shriek from the radio horn. Haskins and Whitley leaped from their seats on the stairs and after a stunned instant rushed down the upper hall to the entrance of their master's suite.

It was barred by a stout door of sheet steel locked on the inside. When Edison Ward's father had rebuilt the old mansion and installed his private laboratory in connection with his own suite, he had inclosed the entire series of his private rooms in heavy walls, proof against fire, shock and sound, so that he might not only work undisturbed by outside noises and prying eyes, but that the rest of the household might not suffer from the violent accidents to which the nature of his work was sometimes subject.

Not only was the single door to the suite burglar-proof, but the outside windows were covered with heavy steel shutters. All these openings were locked from within.

Haskins tried the door, in the vain hope that his master might have thrown back the catch that night on entering. It was locked fast.

"And he may be dying in there!" he groaned to Whitley. "I always said it was dangerous, his not trusting one of us with a key."

He ran to the phone down the hall and called the police and fire department, then, as an afterthought, rang the office of the family physician.

The police alarm was unnecessary. Reserves were already on their way, routed out by the radio in the nearest station.

Meantime, Haskins and Whitley exhausted their strength pounding on the steel door and shouting their master's name in vain. There came no sound in reply through the thick partition. The police were equally helpless when they arrived.

The sergeant was forced to content himself with throwing a cordon of men around the house and hunting outside clews of the intruder, but got no results.

The firemen followed a few moments later and began battering at the door and windows with their axes. At last they forced an entrance through one of the steel shutters. The door was unlocked from the inside, and a score of men rushed in, including the menservants of the household.

The mysterious explosion had presumably taken place in a small inside room between the sitting room and the laboratory. In this room was located the telephone with the microphone attachment for broadcasting, and to it Haskins led the officers and firemen.

The little apartment was completely wrecked, even its steel partitions bulged and cracked from the shock.

The rescue party took in the situation at a glance then looked at one another in bewilderment. In the wrecked room they had fully expected to find at least one mangled body. There was nothing of the sort in evidence.

There was the battered microphone, torn from its wiring and twisted out of recognizable shape by the force of the explosion. Strewn about the floor were the fragments of a desk, a big filing case and two chairs, together with broken glass from the transoms. the two doors of the room were warped and half torn from their hinges.

But Edison Ward must have stood in that room at the instant of the rending percussion. Yet there was not so much as a spot of blood to indicate it.

They made a quick search of the other rooms with like result. At one side of this small intermediate inner room stretched a large laboratory. At the other side was Ward's bedroom, sitting room and bath.

Except for a slight disarray of the furniture and other equipment these other rooms had escaped damage, thanks to the steel partition and doors.

There was no trace of Ward and his assailant, dead or alive. Nevertheless the one door into the suite had been dead-bolted on the inside. So had the steel shutters of all the windows.

"Well, what seems to have been the big idea?" demanded one of the firemen, staring accusingly at Haskins.

"Don't jump on him. We all heard it. Weren't you listening in on the radio?" cut in the puzzled police sergeant.

"Radio, hell!" snorted the fireman. "We'd just got back from a fire when this call came in. We ain't police with nothing to do but sit around and listen to bedtime stories."

"Well, you can see for yourself somebody's tried to blow up the works," the sergeant pointed out, ignoring the sarcasm. "We all heard Mr. Ward talking, heard some roughneck tell him he was going to croak, then heard this explosion and a scream that would curdle yer blood, an' then nothin' more."

"Well, it's a cinch this explosion wasn't the one ye heard," the firefighter declared. "There was nobody here or there'd be remnants of 'em here now. The guy that threw the bomb must have got in, if at all, ahead of Mr. Ward, who seems to have bolted the windows and doors from the inside. And neither he nor Mr.

Ward, if they was alive after the explosion, could get out without unboltin' something, which they didn't do, because the door and windows was still bolted from the inside when we broke in.

"And when all's said and done, nobody could have been in this room when this bomb went off and live to do anything. So what you heard took place somewhere else. You guys don't need firemen anyhow. Let's go, boys."

"But look here," the sergeant demurred, "if you're such a wise guy, tell me something. Everything was dead-bolted on the inside, you say. All right. I agree to that. Then you say there couldn't have been any one in the room. Will you explain how the door and windows could be bolted on the inside if there wasn't anybody in the room to do it?"

The fireman scratched his head.

"That's so, too."

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen," Haskins ventured. "That's neither here nor there anyhow. We know Mr. Ward was in the room when this happened because both Whitley and myself saw him go in that door just before he began his speech. And from the minute his speech started till the explosion, we sat on the stairs where we could watch his door and no one came out or went in. Besides, the windows being locked on the inside, the gardener was outside those windows on guard and nobody could get in or out that way.

"Anyhow, there's no other microphone in the house for Mr. Ward to use. And besides we heard the man who threw the bomb speak over the radio, too, just before the explosion. So he must have been there, too, though it's past me to see how he got in. Mr. Ward's suite is always locked when he isn't in and none of us has the key to it. It's one of those things that seemingly can't be and yet is."

That seemed to be a fair statement of the mystery, though it only left it darker than ever. The firemen, having no further jurisdiction in the matter, filed out, to leave the police to rack their befuddled brains over the affair.

A corps of reporters at the gate were clamoring for information and down in the servants' dining room the neglected radio was blaring forth bulletins of speculation for the further bafflement of a breathlessly waiting world. The telephone rang incessantly, but to all inquiries Haskins gave vague, noncommittal replies.

"I can't say what's happened until Mr. Ward returns," was his dubious formula. "Yes, some one seems to have tried to kill Mr. Ward, but I can't make any statement until he authorizes it!"

This highly unsatisfactory report served only to fix in the public mind the conviction that Edison Ward was dead.

The family physician, Dr. Trevor, arrived in the meantime and, finding no patient to treat and no corpse over which to write a death certificate, was forced to content himself by alleviating the hysteria symptoms of the female servants. Out of curiosity, however, he visited the little room where the explosion took place and watched his brother physician, Coroner Quaide, study the scene with a detective from headquarters.

The detective was a finger-print expert of sorts, but he was making no headway in finding anything illuminating.

"Looks as though you were as useless around here as I am, Quaide," Dr. Trevor remarked. "Ever read that fool story about the murderer who dissolved his victim's body in a bathtub and let it drain off?"

"Can't say that I ever did," the coroner replied a little irritably.

"Well, it looks to me as if something of that kind might have been pulled off here, some explosive used that dissipated the body of the victim into a volatile gas."

"If that's the case the murderer must have been caught in his own trap," the coroner snorted. "The only way he could have escaped was through the keyhole."

"That might be, too."

"I'm afraid you've got too vivid an imagination for me, doctor," the coroner snorted, and abruptly turned his back.

"Well, it's either that or spooks," Trevor remarked as he took his departure. "Personally I much prefer a scientific explanation."

But if Dr. Trevor was in a bantering mood, his serious countenance belied it as he went down the hall, absorbed in thought.

The police sergeant was just turning away from the phone as the doctor came along.

"Anything new?" the latter asked.

"I've just been checkin' up with the telephone people and the broadcasting station," the sergeant told him. "There's no doubt about it. He was broadcasting from that phone with the microphone attachment in the room where the explosion occurred. They connected with that number from the broadcasting station just before he began his speech, and he gave 'em the O. K. that he was ready to shoot."

"Here's a thought I have to contribute, sergeant," Trevor rejoined. "You can pass it on to your brother officer, the detective in there. I won't butt in again myself. The coroner seems to be a little touchy. After the explosion to-night, there was a loud scream. Now how could a man scream at a perceptible interval after he was blown to pieces by a bomb? Also, how could the radio instrument transmit that scream after the microphone had been torn from its moorings as that was? Ask your sleuth to think it over."

V.

THE sergeant looked dumbly at the dapper back of the departing doctor until the latter had disappeared down the stairs. Then rubbing his chin thoughtfully he sought out the coroner and plainclothes man to whom he passed on Dr. Trevor's tip.

Quaide shrugged disdainfully.

"Then I suppose he told you it was a spook that squealed," he sneered. "Does that man Trevor think he's the only one around here to notice an obvious thing like that? That's the point in the story that hit me hard the minute I heard it. And that's the line I'm working on."

The sergeant winked at his brother officer behind the pompous little coroner's back. Both recognized Dr. Quaide's familiar method of covering up his own lack of insight.

"What's your theory, doctor?" the detective asked gravely.

"I'll just tell you this much," the other conceded mysteriously. "Watch the servants around here and get as good a line on them as you can. Some one knows something he isn't telling, you can see that. Human beings don't sift back and forth through steel doors regardless. And a bomb doesn't blow up right in a small room with a human being without leaving a pretty bad mess. Now, who cleaned it up and disposed of the body and the evidence and why?"

Little Dr. Quaide looked at them triumphantly as though he had really solved something.

"That wouldn't help us figure out how the guy came and went with everything bolted on the inside," demurred the detective.

"Ah, but was it?" demanded the coroner. "The man who made that outcry evidently survived the explosion and was able to leave the room and the suite, taking with him all apparent evidence of murder. It must have been somebody familiar with these rooms, who knew of some secret exit, perhaps a hidden panel, not apparent to us. We must search for something of that sort and at the same time, as

I have suggested, keep an eye on these servants, particularly that butler."

"Granted all that," the sergeant replied. "How did that scream get over the radio with the microphone torn from the wall?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the coroner. "Another bit of evidence. Evidently the microphone was not torn from the wall by the explosion. The man we are looking for must have torn it out afterward to prevent any further incriminating sounds from reaching the public."

The officers remained skeptical, but humored the coroner to the extent of sounding every foot of the floors, walls and ceilings in the suite in search for secret panels or passages, without results. The rest of the house was subjected to the same scrutiny.

At midnight they gave it up for the time being and departed after locking and sealing Ward's suite and leaving a police guard in the hall outside the door as well as one on the grounds under the windows of the suite. The servants retired to fitful slumber and the rest of the night passed uneventfully in that house of mysterious tragedy.

The frightened household were up at dawn the next morning, still dazed and decidedly jumpy of nerves. The patrolman was still pacing back and forth in the hall waiting wearily and cynically for his relief when Haskins brought him a cup of coffee.

He had heard and seen nothing since his fellow officers left the house at midnight. The man on outside duty reported the same uneventful condition.

At seven o'clock the servants were still lingering at breakfast reading the highly speculative and hysterical story in the morning papers. Mrs. Meanes, the housekeeper, broke into a fresh burst of weeping as the clock on the shelf indicated seven.

"The very moment when he would be ringing for Mr. Whitley as regular as the clock, like his father before him, and his ring identically like his father's," she sobbed.

And at that instant, as if set in motion by her words, the buzzer from the master's suite gave its customary short, sharp, peremptory ring. Mrs. Meanes shrieked and slipped to the floor in a faint.

Haskins and Whitley leaped to their feet and stood staring at the ceiling, white-lipped and trembling. Then they looked at each other in affrighted inquiry.

"I think we'd better go and see what it is," Whitley, the valet, suggested tremulously, with emphasis on the "we."

A sharp repetition of the ring put an end to their hesitation.

"It seems like the policeman up there might have told me that Mr. Ward had returned," Haskins whispered complainingly as they started up the stairs.

"Perhaps he was asleep on the job and didn't know it," Whitley whispered.

But the officer, who was squatting on the floor finishing his coffee, indignantly swore that he had not slept a wink and had seen no one.

"That bell's gone nutty," he declared. "Anyhow you can't open that door till the boss says the word. It's sealed, and besides you said you hadn't any key. The sergeant pulled a bull when he slammed it last night with the spring-lock snapped on. They'll have to get a locksmith to open it this morning."

Again the buzzer sounded, this time a series of staccato snarls of impatience. The door below was open now and the officer heard it also.

"See," the bluecoat explained patiently, "just as I told you, something gone wrong with the battery or something."

But while the two menservants hesitated, half convinced, the officer's theory was suddenly upset. There was a rattle at the lock of Ward's door

and it snapped open splitting the portentous police seal squarely in two.

There stood revealed the stalwart, pyjama-clad figure of Edison Ward showing no signs whatever of having passed through an explosion the previous evening.

"Oh, Whitley—" he began in a mildly irritated voice meant to reach the regions below where he apparently assumed his valet was lolling in unprecedented tardiness.

Then he grasped the fact that not only his valet, but his butler and one of the city's police stood at awed attention before him.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean? What the devil's happened?"

"We didn't know you were in, sir," the valet began, finding voice first.

"Didn't know I was in—" Ward started and then stopped, something like embarrassment coming over his face. "But why the policeman?"

"Well, the captain thought I better stick around till you came back, sir," the officer faltered in his bewilderment.

Edison Ward stared at him for a long moment.

"Suppose you wait till I dress," he decided finally. "I'll talk to you while I'm having breakfast."

He turned back into the suite followed by the dazed Whitley, and the door closed on the equally bewildered butler and officer of the law. Haskins returned to the servants' dining room where Mrs. Meanes had revived to a fit of hysterical weeping.

He had barely restored her and the two maids to approximate calm when the buzzer from the breakfast room sounded and he went in with his employer's morning meal.

Edison Ward sat in his usual place, reading the paper, while the officer perched awkwardly on the edge of a chair in the corner. As the old servant covertly studied the young man's face he saw there a look of wondering amazement as the supposed explosion victim read the lurid account of what the reporters imagined had happened to him the night before.

After he had finished reading, he sat for a long time in silence, staring at his neglected breakfast.

"I suppose you are wondering what became of me last night," he remarked to Haskins and the officer at last. "Well, I can't tell you much yet till I get things straightened out better in my own mind. I'm as much puzzled as you are about just what happened, but I'm on the track of something, and I'd rather not talk till I've run it down a little further.

"So, officer, suppose you say nothing till I've talked to your chief. I believe I can persuade him to let the public think I'm dead for a few days, while I do a little snooping around in my own peculiar fashion. And you, Haskins, and the rest of the servants, will keep my return to life to yourselves strictly till I give the word otherwise."

Then, without further comment, Edison Ward turned to the eating of his breakfast. But, in spite of his studied calm, the butler, watching his face furtively, detected that look of baffled amazement still there.

The officer, his countenance red with bottled up protest, started twice to voice it, then gave it up and departed.

"Somebody around here's either drunk or crazy," he muttered to himself, "but it ain't up to me to contradict Mr. Edison Ward."

VI.

When Bill, the gardener, reported that all had been quiet on the Ward grounds at the time of the mysterious bombing he had not meant to conceal anything of seeming importance. One minor incident he did not mention until he was compelled to in court long afterward, for fear that the other servants might get too much amusement at the expense of himself and Joe, his

assistant, who had been guarding the grounds with him.

Just before the muffled roar of the bomb came to their ears from overhead, Bill heard a twig snap in the mass of dark shrubbery behind the spot where he was stationed under the windows of Ward's suite. He turned and dodged swiftly behind a bush, listening intently in the direction of the sound.

Not hearing it repeated, he stole forward in the shelter of the bushes, automatic in hand ready for use. He fancied he saw a shadow a little denser than the foliage.

"Who's there? Stop! I've got ye covered!" he cried, springing forward.

But the shadow he had seen apparently was nothing but a shadow. He heard the laugh of his assistant near by at the left.

"What's the matter, Bill?" Joe asked. "Seein' things?"

"Oh, was that you prowlin' around, Joe?" Bill exclaimed in great relief. "I came near drillin' ye."

But a moment later, from near the spot where Bill had heard the twig snap, a figure detached itself silently from the heart of a small cedar tree and hugging tight to the shrubbery hurried toward the rear of the grounds. Not far from the high wall that surrounded the estate he paused in a little clear space from which he could see the dim, dark bulk of the big house against the sky-line.

A faint gleam from a street-lamp the other side of the wall fell on him for a moment. Bill, the gardener, would have been treated to a surprise if he had stuck to his first impression and followed the intruder.

The man was in police uniform, but his face was not one that would have admitted him readily to any civilized police force in the world. It was a dark, crafty face with close-set, gleaming eyes under a low brow, a distinctly criminal type.

The fellow placed a police whistle between his lips and, holding a pair of night glasses to his eyes, studied the big house intently. After several minutes there was a low but sharp crackling in the direction of the wall behind him, a sound like a fire in dry brush.

But apparently the man in the police uniform paid no attention to this. He continued to study the old house through the glasses.

Then came the muffled, distant roar of the bomb in the inner room of Edison Ward's suite. Still the fellow watched unperturbed for a moment longer. Then, with a snort of disgust, he lowered the glasses and removed the whistle from his lips.

"Hell! Never cracked it!" he exclaimed. "Redfern didn't make his stuff strong enough after all his wise cracks about blowin' up the old hut like an eggshell. Nothin' doin' on a raid now, even if the place wasn't filthy with real cops!"

A twig cracked near him, and the fellow dodged back into a clump of rhododendrons.

"Judas Priest! Another one!" he whispered, and after listening breathlessly for a moment, began creeping silently toward the wall.

At the foot of a big maple tree whose spreading branches overhung the wall, he paused and listened again, then began swiftly shinning up the trunk. On a level with the top of the wall he came to a large limb which hung far across the high spike-topped parapet.

Getting astride this limb he hitched his way out across the wall and presently lowered himself onto the porch roof of a shabby little house that stood just outside the Ward grounds.

A moment he stood on the roof, listening intently in the direction of the tree. Again he fancied he heard a sound of movement the other side of the wall.

"Guess maybe I'm gettin' nutty an' hearin' things," he whispered, and tiptoed over to a window under the low

eaves of a gable that rose above the porch roof. Raising the sash quietly he let himself into a dark room beyond and closed the window behind him.

This little house, under the very wall of the home of one of America's richest men, was an anomaly in this exclusive neighborhood. Old John Moran, a day laborer, had built it half a century before the city's rich men had sought homes in this region. He had resisted all offers to sell, and had died there recently.

His widow was living with her son in a distant city, but still refused to sell the little house. To-night it stood dark and silent, to all outside appearance deserted in its little hedge-inclosed yard, excepting for this strange intruder in a police uniform.

But the fellow felt his way across the bedroom to which the window had admitted him, moving with the assurance of one who was used to feeling his way about that apartment in the dark. At the far side of the room a steep pair of stairs led to the lower floor.

The man descended and stepped out into a low-ceilinged, dimly lighted room, an old-fashioned sitting room and dining room combined, with a big unlighted fireplace at one end. Heavy curtains at the windows kept such light as there was from betraying the house's occupancy to the outside world.

Some twenty men, all in police uniform like the newcomer, stood about the room. There was an air of alert expectancy on their faces, countenances as incongruous in connection with the police uniforms as that of the man who had just arrived.

One of them, a tall, commanding figure, stood a little apart from the others. He was posing in a grandiloquent attitude, one hand outstretched.

"The king of publicity is dead," he was explaining. "There is the hand that slew him. Now we're ready to destroy his secret. Is everybody all set for the break as soon as we hear Ivan's whistle? Remember, work fast, and don't make any false moves. Our success depends on getting in and away before the servants discover we're not real cops, and before the real cops arrive. I'm hoping the house will be such a wreck that we won't have to bother with the front door, and that our dead friend's wall safe, with his little secret in it, will have been kicked right out in the open by the explosion, so that we won't have to waste any time hunting for it."

"But here's Ivan now!" somebody in the back of the group exclaimed, as the newcomer entered the room from the stairway.

The one who had been haranguing the pseudo officers stopped abruptly and stared at the man called Ivan, his expression a mixture of surprise and rage.

"What the devil's the matter?" he demanded. "We've been waiting for your whistle for a good five minutes. We ought to be in there and halfway out again. Probably the reserves are almost there by now. Don't tell me you've bungled something."

"It wasn't I that bungled things, Redfern," Ivan replied, a little defiantly, looking his leader squarely in the eye. "In the first place, the grounds were alive with plainclothes men before the bomb went off. At least three of them gave me a run, and I beat it out just in time. Looks as though there might 'a' been a leak. And your bomb must 'a' been a dud. Never even shook the old house after your tellin' us it would blow the walls out so that we could walk right in and pick up the safe."

There were murmurs of surprise and disbelief around the group.

"Dud, hell!!"

"Dud, like a twelve-inch gun!"

"Didn't we get it off the radio, and hear Ward croak?"

These and other skeptical comments.

"Oh, I heard an explosion like a small firecracker," Ivan sneered.

"Just a minute," Redfern broke in, "we certainly heard every indication that my bomb went off in the proper place and did the job we set it for. Do you mean to tell me that the house wasn't damaged on the outside, and that you didn't hear a loud report?"

"You've said it. That's just what I mean to say."

Redfern was silent, absorbed in thought for several minutes.

"Well, there's no doubt about the bomb going off and getting Ward. If you didn't see any signs of it on the outside, or hear much, there's just one answer. Brady was right when he said that Ward had a sound-proof and burglar proof laboratory rigged up there.

"So they had cops guarding the house, did they? Well, I'm not surprised.

"Naturally they'd be careful after the attack that crazy nut of a Yosoff made on him the other day. It was a mistake taking him into the gang. We might have known he'd fly off the handle and try to do something on his own hook. But are you sure nobody trailed you back here?"

As if in answer to this query of Redfern's, there was a thud on the low roof over their heads, a series of lesser thuds as of some object rolling down the shingles, then a crash in the underbrush outside the window.

VII.

Everybody in the room started violently at this unexpected interruption. Redfern's hands flashed to a light button in the wall behind him, and the room was plunged in darkness.

"Everybody quiet," he whispered, "while I take a look around. Remember, if you hear an owl hoot, everybody sift out the back way."

The door opened softly and Redfern slipped into the yard. For several minutes there was not a sound. Then they heard the door close again. The light flashed on, and their leader was with them once more.

"Nothing but a brick falling off that old loose chimney," he told them. "I found it out in the bush here where it fell. We won't take any chances, though. You slip back on the roof, Ivan, and scout around.

"Mercer and Hawkins, you go up with him as far as the bedroom window, ready to do a little shooting if there's anybody there. But you'd better stay on the ridgepole, Ivan, with your night glass, and keep a lookout. Stay there till I give you the word to get out. We've got a long meeting ahead of us to-night to decide what to do next."

The three men departed up the stairs, and the company below waited until Mercer and Hawkins returned and reported that Ivan had found everything quiet above.

"Very good," Redfern announced. "Now there's no use in taking a chance on trying to do anything to-night, as long as things have turned out the way Ivan reports. There was only an off chance that we could put the whole works over to-night, anyhow. We've made a mighty good start by getting Ward out of the way. It 'll be a long while before the International Company recovers from his loss, and they may never get his secret.

"Remember, they can't manufacture the televisor for popular use without Ward's secret, and Coddington tells me he's under the impression that Ward has never put the whole secret on paper. But, anyhow, such as it is, we've got as good a chance of getting it and destroying it yet as the officers of the company have of getting it and using it.

"Coddington is sure that Ward keeps his secret in a hidden wall safe somewhere in his house. I counted on getting that safe to-night. It 'll be some time before they cut the red tape of the estate and get at it, even if he's left directions for finding it in case it

is there. So, meantime, we'd better wait until the excitement dies down a little, and then we can strike for it."

There was a chorus of protests at this. One man, bent and prematurely old in appearance, with a suggestion of prison pallor in his face, voiced the sentiments of the rest.

"I tell you, Redfern, we can't take any chances on waitin'. I'm in favor of settin' fire to the house and burnin' it down, cops or no cops. Then we'd have a chance of findin' the safe in the ruins. It's worth a try, even if we have to fight the cops off while we do it.

"Why, Redfern, think of what this means to us crooks, especially us old stir bugs, who ain't got a chance at makin' a living if we had to go straight. If this televisor is what they claim, once put it in everybody's hands and the crook game is through. Who's goin' to risk crackin' a safe if there may be a little mirror stuck somewhere in the face of it that he can't tell from the rest of the safe, an' that's flashing a movin' picture of what he's doin' right into the office of the chief of police while he's at work? If this thing was in use now, we wouldn't even dare to meet here to-night and be talking this thing over, fer fear the bulls might be listenin' in on us.

"Why, they tell me they'd have these mirrors stuck in windows along every street and connected up with headquarters, so that the cops can sit right at a desk and hunt up any man that's wanted in the city if he dare stick his head out of doors. And suppose a man does pull a job an' make a get-away? How far is he goin' to get when in about two seconds they can flash his picture into every jerk-water town in the world, and post it where any hick that happens along would be able to identify him?

"You remember what happened less than a year ago, when they were just experimentin' with one of the first of these dinguses between New York and Philadelphia, a thing that cost so much only a millionaire could own it, an' couldn't do anything but carry a picture to the other end of the wire when a fellow was stuck right in front of the mirror and held still for a minute or so.

"They'd caught a guy in New York that couldn't be identified except by a man that was dying in Philadelphia. What did they do but put this guy in front of a mirror in New York, and have the guy in Philadelphia identify him about two minutes before he croaked. We're gettin' every crook an' real liberty-lover in the country lined up against this thing.

"I understand all that, Zornow," Redfern broke in. "It's because we want to put a stop to the damned contrivance that we've formed this organization, and you want to stop worrying right now. We'll do it yet. The International Company owns all the rights on this instrument, but they can't manufacture it without Ward's secret. Ward is dead, and we're going to find and destroy his secret. That will wreck the International Company, especially when we've made doubly sure by blowing up their plants, as we are all ready to do the minute we've copped the secret.

"Why, nobody's more interested in this thing than I am. I've never told you just how I came to be in this. I'll tell you now. Twenty years ago, when old Thomas Ward was just a poor inventor, I was an associate of his. I made an invention that he never gave me full credit for. He gypped me out of it, and I left him. I am still a poor man. Ward's son is one of the richest men in the world, and owns a monopoly on the whole radio business. I've been waiting for years to get my revenge.

"Now, as I've told you, Vice President Coddington, of the International Company, is ambitious to side track young Ward and get control of the company himself. Of course he doesn't

know what I'm up to. He wouldn't stand for murder. But I've got a strangle hold on him.

"To-morrow night I'm going to find out whether he knows where Ward's secret is, and I may be able to get hold of it through him. If that doesn't work, we'll make a final try at the house, and then I'll pass the word to touch off the TNT mines that we've laid under the International plants. I think that's all for to-night. You fellows can drift now and keep under cover till you get a call for another meeting."

Again Redfern switched off the light, and in the darkened room there was the scarcely audible sound of men stealing cautiously out into the night one by one. At length, Redfern was alone.

The master crook turned to a big cabinet that stood beside the old-fashioned fireplace at the end of the room. This was the only modern touch in the antique apartment.

It contained a complete small radio outfit, both a receiving and sending set, of the latest new Pigmy models. Redfern put on the ear phones and listened to the reports of the Ward bombing coming in from a local news service, as obtained at police headquarters.

As he heard the baffling account of what the police had found in Ward's private suite, or rather what they had not found, his face took on a puzzled expression.

"Now, what the hell does that mean —no trace of a body found?" he ruminated. "Something queer about this I can't dope out. I wonder if that boy got wise somehow, and put up a job on us? I wonder if Coddington got onto something and has been double crossing me? I wonder if I made a mistake calling on Coddington in his office that day? That little girl secretary of Ward's came in and gave me the once-over, I remember, and I didn't like the look on her face when she went out? I wonder if she had me placed?"

In the midst of his musings he was interrupted by another thud on the roof directly over his head, followed by a piercing scream, as of a man in mortal agony. Then there was a sound as of a heavy body rolling down the shingles, and a crashing fall in the yard outside the window.

Redfern stood listening, breathless and hesitant. For several minutes he waited for some other sound, his automatic in his hand ready for instant use.

At length, when no other sound came, he stole softly to the door and opened it gradually, until he was able to ease his body through. Cautiously, little more than an inch at a time, he worked his way around to the spot where he had heard the final fall.

There his toe struck something yielding, and he heard a groan in the grass at his feet. He bent low and turned on a flash light cautiously.

It was Ivan, whom he had sent up to the ridgepole to keep guard. The fellow lay on his back, staring up at Redfern, his face twisted with pain and terror.

"God in heaven, I saw him!" the injured man gasped.

"Saw who?" Redfern demanded.

"His ghost! Ward's ghost floating toward me on the ridgepole! Scared me so I fell!"

A tremor shook the broken man, and he ceased breathing. Redfern listened for a moment, his ear to the chest, then straightened up with a smothered oath.

"What in the devil's name am I up against, anyway?" he muttered, and stooping he picked up the broken body in his arms, and staggered off with it through a small gate in the rear of the little hedge-inclosed lot.

VIII.

To return to Edison Ward, this morning, after his supposed murder and miraculous resurrection, he com-

pleted his breakfast hastily, as soon as he had dismissed the police officer with a warning to keep the affair secret. Then he went directly to his own suite, and locking himself in, gave a hasty glance at the wrecked room in which he had met his supposed death.

But before getting down to a close examination of the wreckage, he turned on his radio to get the latest news report on the mysterious happening. He listened about a half hour, but learned practically nothing beyond what the newspaper account had given him. He was relieved to hear no inference that there was any doubt about his death.

Several other unrelated items were interpolated in the course of the news report. To one of these Edison Ward listened with peculiar interest, and shuddered at its conclusion.

"The dead body of a man was found early this morning in the shrubbery beside the Eastern Boulevard, near Gilson Avenue," the report ran. "The man's neck was broken and there were severe bruises about the body. It is believed that he had been hit by a motor while walking in the highway. He had evidently been dead for several hours; the accident apparently happening during the darkness of the night. The body has not yet been identified. The man was of medium height, slender, of light complexion, and wore a police uniform. It seems probable that he was masquerading for some purpose or other, as his badge was a bogus one, and at police headquarters he is not recognized as any member of the force."

Edison Ward sat in thoughtful silence for some minutes after this report was concluded, and then turned to the business of a careful inspection of the interior of his wrecked room. The mass of débris told a tale as puzzling as that in the newspapers.

The explosion had evidently taken place near the microphone, but if any human being had entered that room and thrown a bomb, he would have been killed himself by the explosion. The expression of Ward's face as he worked indicated that he was as puzzled over what he found as the police had been.

Piece by piece he went over the fragments of débris. The bits of furniture were quickly recognized and set aside. There were also the sections of a radio receiving set he had installed there and which had been completely blown to pieces. In addition were the remnants of a quantity of spare radio parts, which he had kept in the shattered cabinet.

The one certainly alien element were the fragments of a cast iron shell which he pieced together into a sphere of the size and nature of the bomb he had caught in his hands in front of his office building, a shell, he would judge, made in the same mold as the other, and probably by the same evil genius.

When Ward had completed his investigation he failed to show any indication in his countenance that he had learned anything that shed any light on the puzzle that was troubling him.

He turned to the house phone and got Haskins.

"Haskins," he directed, "will you call up my office and ask for Miss Marian Lord. Do not, under any circumstances, admit to her that I am alive, you understand. I wish to reveal that fact to her myself. Simply tell her that something has come up in connection with my private correspondence, and that she is wanted out here at my home at once Tell her you can explain nothing further over the phone, but insist on her coming. When she arrives show her in the reception room and let me know."

Ward spent the interval awaiting Marian's arrival pacing nervously back and forth in his sitting room. He told himself that he was confiding in Marian Lord because she was the only one in whom he felt perfect confidence.

Such is the infatuation of a lover, that it never occurred to him to ask

himself why he trusted Marian Lord. He would have been highly indignant if he had been told that he was summoning that young woman at the promptings of his heart rather than his head.

When Haskins told him finally, after what seemed like an interminable wait, that Marian had arrived, he was seized with a sudden dread of meeting her. How would she take his seemingly miraculous return from the dead, he wondered?

"Just a moment, Haskins," he called to the departing butler. "It occurs to me that my unexpected appearance may startle the young lady. I will be down in a few moments. Meantime, suppose you go back, and gently break the news to her that I am not dead after all, but will be down presently."

A few minutes later Ward stepped into the reception room and surprised Marian Lord in the act of dabbing at her eyes with a little lace handkerchief. She jumped to her feet with a visible effort to appear calm.

As he advanced to meet her, she hesitated for a moment, and then ran to him with her hands outstretched.

"Oh, I'm so glad to know that was a false report! I can't tell you how glad I—we are at the office—that is how glad they will be when they find it out," she ended a little lamely, and flushed under his own confused gaze.

He took her hand and held it a moment, and for a second time Edison Ward came near declaring himself to Marian Lord. But he hesitated, and again the moment passed.

Once more the bugaboo of publicity rose between them. Until this ghastly thing was settled he could not drag her into it, even assuming what his modesty did not yet allow him to hope, that she cared for him.

"Sit down, please, Miss Lord," he said, a little awkwardly. "I sent for you on a very confidential mission. No one else outside of my household and two or three of the police, know that I was not killed by that bomb last night. I don't wish anybody else to know it for the present, because I think by keeping it secret, I will be able to unearth a murder conspiracy.

"You are doubtless puzzled by the newspaper report. Frankly, I am, too. Of course, I was not in the room when the bomb exploded. You wonder how I could be broadcasting from there then? I prefer not to explain that at the present, not because I don't trust you, but because my enemies seem to have mysterious ways of overhearing things.

"You also wonder how a man could throw a bomb in that room and not be killed himself. So do I. I suspected that in some way he had planted a bomb with a time clock attachment, but I find no traces of any fragments of any such machinery in the débris. That wouldn't account for his voice being heard over the radio, even if true. But we'll let that pass for the present.

"What I sent for you for is this: I need to take one other person into my confidence, and I am going to ask you to pick him for me. You remember that I dictated a letter to you the other day to A. G. Sax & Co., industrial engineers, to send on the young investigators about whom he had corresponded. Have they arrived yet?"

"Yes, they came yesterday, and Mr. Coddington has set them to work."

"I would like to have you go back to the office immediately, and make some excuse for talking for a few moments with each one of those men; then pick out the one who, in your judgment, could be most safely trusted with a confidential mission, and send him up here. Tell him nothing excepting that he is under no circumstances to let any one around the office know where he has gone. Of course, do not tell him that I'm alive. I'll reveal that fact in person."

It was characteristic of Marian Lord that she asked no questions. And it

was characteristic of the shy Edison Ward that he had no personal small talk with which to close up the colloquy, although he longed with all his heart to detain her for a time on any pretext whatever.

So, after a few perfunctory commonplaces, his secretary took her departure, and Ward went back to his laboratory to await the arrival of the young man from Sax & Co.

About two o'clock that afternoon an alert looking chap, of about thirty, presented himself at the door, and gave the name of Horace Flint from Sax & Co. He was closeted in Ward's suite for the rest of the afternoon and early evening. When he finally left he carried with him a huge grip, like a traveling man's sample case.

IX.

REDFERN, the arch conspirator, had taken up permanent quarters in the little Moran cottage. He was taking good pains not to show himself abroad during daylight.

It was still dark when he returned through the little gate in the rear hedge, after accomplishing his gruesome errand of so disposing of the body of the unfortunate Ivan that the police would not be likely to connect his death with the deserted cottage under the Ward wall. He slept until late afternoon, and then, after a protracted meal, which he prepared himself, he idled the time away until dark, listening to radio reports.

About eight o'clock he arose and, going to the little bedroom overhead, dressed himself in an inconspicuous business suit, and attached to his face a deftly contrived false beard and mustache, partially concealing the character of his eyes under slightly tinted spectacles. Then he slipped out of the house, and through the back gate in the hedge into the side street, without being noted by any passers.

From there he walked casually down the nearest cross street and into a tobacco store on the corner, with all the appearance of a business man of the neighborhood strolling in to get a cigar after dinner. Having made his purchase, he slipped into a telephone booth and called a number.

"That you, Mart?" he said when a male voice answered. "This is Dan. How about a little game to-night?"

"O. K.," replied the voice on the wire, and Redfern hung up. A few minutes later he was back in the living room of the Moran cottage.

Some half hour afterward another man slipped quietly through the gate in the hedge, and as quietly tiptoed across the yard onto the low porch, and gave three light taps on the door, which opened promptly.

He was admitted into a pitch dark room. Not until the door was closed and locked did Redfern turn on the light. The caller was Vice-President Coddington, of the International Radio Corporation.

Face to face, the two men gave each other no such familiar and cordial greeting as their brief exchange at the telephone code would seem to warrant.

"Sit down, Coddington," Redfern grunted. "I rather thought you'd come running."

Coddington obeyed, but glared defiantly at his host as he did so.

"I came because I am curious to know what explanation you have to make for some of the things that have happened. Whether I agree to play with you any more, or decide to call the police, remains to be seen."

Coddington's attempt at defiance seemed to appeal to Redfern's sense of humor. He replaced his surly manner with one of semiderision.

"Well, it needn't remain to be seen very long, old dear," he drawled, "because I'll tell you a few things right away, and while I'm telling them I'm damn sure if you haven't any dictograph in the wall with the idea of double crossing me, in the first place, you

won't tell the police anything, because you've got nothing to tell that you can prove. They can search this place, if they want to, and prove nothing excepting that I am living here for the present, and conducting some radio experiments, having rented the place temporarily from the absent Mrs. Moran, who had kindly consented to keep the fact secret by virtue of double rental with the explanation that I wanted to keep my experiments quiet."

"Suppose I told the police that it was you who murdered Edison Ward?" Coddington exclaimed with a shudder. "Damn you, you know that when I agreed to let you work with me a little, I had no idea of standing for murder, or any other serious crime. You came to me and told me your story about being gypped out of an invention by old man Ward.

"You claimed that you could come pretty near reproducing Edison Ward's secret invention on the televisor, and that you had a scheme whereby we might get hold of the secret anyhow, and freeze Ward out. I consented when you intimated that we might work on the young man's hatred of publicity, to get him to retire and give us a free field. Even when you suggested getting up a bomb scare to try to frighten him out of it I thought it would be all right."

"Well," Redfern admitted easily. "Your statement as to how we got into business together is fair enough, as between ourselves, but how would it sound if you started telling the police about my alleged murderous doings, and I should bring forth certain little documents that have passed between us that would indicate your criminal participation?"

Coddington started visibly.

"No communication from me has any reference to killing Ward," he asserted.

"If you stop and think," Redfern went on evenly, "you will recall two or three that pretty closely link us up. So closely that, with one or two things that I have up my sleeve which you have evidently overlooked, you would be directly implicated in any charges you made to the police. So, as I started out to say, it needn't remain to be seen very long as to whether you will report me to the police or not. You won't, old dear. Not if you know what's healthy for you.

"As for this poor nut who threw the bomb at Ward the other day, I admit I made a mistake ever taking him into the organization. He went off on his own hook in that premature attempt, and nearly spilled the beans. Fortunately, his form of insanity is of the fanatical variety and he won't try to implicate me. If he does, he can't prove anything. As for the bomb that killed Edison Ward, I can prove by some twenty witnesses that I was not in the Ward house at the time, and I defy you to explain that bombing or connect me with it in any way. That's enough of that.

"Now, as to whether you will continue on with me and do what I want you to, that needn't remain to be seen very long either. That's what I brought you here for. You are going to help me get hold of that secret formula of Ward's, and then you are going to see to it when the business is reorganized that I have a controlling interest in the stock of the corporation in return for that formula, which shall be entered in the new capitalization scheme as my property."

"I'll see you in hell first," Coddington snorted.

"You may see me in hell, but you'll be there first," Redfern retorted. "Let me tell you something. I'm going to rule or ruin in this matter. I started out to get revenge by wiping out the Wards and with it the International Corporation. As far as this formula is concerned, after using it for my purposes, I am inclined to think that we won't manufacture this televisor. I agree with my devoted followers that

too much publicity is a bad thing for gentlemen in our line of activity, and would be just as well pleased simply to destroy the formula after making a few for my own use, but I will give you your choice as to whether I rule the International Company, or destroy it.

For your information I will tell you that for the last six months, my little band has been diligently at work planting charges of TNT in the basements of every one of the plants of the International concern. These mines are all connected with a single firing device that I can set off by simply pressing a button at any time that my spies report a suspicious move on your part. If you don't believe it, call my bluff."

Coddington made an effort to stare the other down, but it was a feeble attempt. He visibly wilted before Redfern's steady glare. Sweat poured out on his face. Finally he shrugged helplessly.

"All right. You seem to have me," he surrendered.

"That's better," Redfern told him heartily. "Now that we are little pals again I'll tell you of a suspicion of mine that may surprise you. I don't believe that Edison Ward is dead."

Coddington started violently and turned even paler than before.

"Not dead!" he exclaimed. "Why, how can that be? Nearly everybody in the world heard it. To be sure, there was a lot of secrecy about the reports, but I suppose that was policy in attempting to baffle the criminals. In fact, I have not yet been able to make any headway in securing a coroner's inquest to establish legally the death of Mr. Ward."

"There you are. Well, now, to talk open and aboveboard, I think in some mysterious way, in spite of all precautions, Ward got word beforehand that something was going to happen. My man, Ivan, who was scouting around the grounds just before the bombing, came scuttling back, and said that a lot of plainclothes cops had been stationed about the grounds. So we were obliged to postpone a little raid upon the house that I had planned for the time of the bombing.

"I perched him on the roof up here to keep watch in case our place was suspected and they tried to raid us. A little later I found his body badly broken up out in the yard after the gang had gone. Just before he died he declared he had seen Edison Ward's ghost. Now, I don't attempt to explain it, but I don't believe in ghosts. It may be that it was the hallucination of a dying man, but I am more inclined to believe that it was a fact.

"Now, the beauty of it is, if I am right, and by some trick Edison Ward escaped that bomb and is just playing dead in order to pry into our affairs, we may be able to turn the tables on him without doing any more bombing. Ivan's body was found over by the boulevard, but suppose we find that Ward is alive and can't prove that he was in that room where the bomb went off, I might cook up a sweet little murder charge against him."

Coddington was recovering from his first discomfiture and at these words of Redfern he showed a revival of interest.

"That's a good idea," he agreed. "That's much better than this rough stuff, like bombing. Let's have no more of that."

"Well, we'll put that on file among the other little things we have up our sleeve," the arch plotter continued. "Now, what I'd like to get at is, whether there is a traitor in our camp, or whether some bright-eyed little spy is prying into our affairs. What do you know about that Lord girl, who is Ward's secretary? The way she looked at me that time I called at your office has been on my nerves ever since."

Coddington considered an instant.

"It wouldn't surprise me if she knew more than she ought to," he agreed. "As a matter of fact, I've

been watching the girl, and came to the conclusion some time ago that she was secretly in love with Edison Ward, though I don't think the young man knows it. Then, it's possible that one of that bunch of experts which Ward got the Sax people to send to our place to study the works may be a spy. I've got my eye on them, too."

"I'm glad you're watching. Particularly look out for that girl. A little taffy might go better than force. Why not make love to her now that Ward's supposedly dead?"

Coddington smirked.

"I can imagine a more unpleasant task," he admitted. "I'll think it over."

"Now," Redfern went on, "we've disposed of the odds and ends, let's get down to details. Whether Ward is dead or not, he's got that televisor formula hidden away somewhere. You think it's in a secret wall safe in his suite. Have you made any progress toward a peaceable method of getting into Ward's rooms and starting a hunt for it?"

"Well," Coddington admitted, "you're forcing my hand a little now. I have been quietly taking steps toward getting the inside line on Ward's affairs. A week ago, in fact, I made some progress toward corrupting his valet, a chap named Whitley.

"He doesn't know what I'm aiming at, but I've slipped him a good retainer, and told him that I was going to call him up sometime before long and have a meeting with him. I've tested him far enough to prove that he's a crook, and for enough money will keep his mouth shut, particularly if he thinks he's on the winning side."

"Good!" Redfern exclaimed. "We'll send for Whitley at once."

X.

An hour later Coddington who, at Redfern's directions, had stepped out to a near-by telephone booth, returned with Ward's valet. Once inside the rendezvous at the Moran cottage, Coddington said:

"I've put things pretty straight to Whitley, and made it clear to him that we are not going to do anything actually criminal in this matter, but that Mr. Ward has concealed in his rooms a document that rightfully belongs to us, but which we cannot legally acquire by open methods. It will also interest you, Redfern, to know that you were correct in your guess that Edison Ward is still alive."

"Fine!" Redfern exclaimed. "I guess maybe then we can turn the tables after all, and you won't have your scruples violated by bloodshed."

"Whitley tells me," Coddington went on, "that he is never left alone in Ward's suite, and has never had an opportunity to make a search for the safe since I approached him on the matter, but he thinks from the very secrecy with which Ward guards his rooms that he must keep his valuables somewhere concealed there."

"All right. Now let's get down to business and cook up a scheme to get us in not later than to-morrow evening."

The three conspirators discussed ways and means for an hour or more, and finally parted with the understanding that Coddington and Redfern should come to the Ward grounds at a little after ten on the following evening, and wait near the servants' entrance until Whitley summoned them.

It happened that Edison Ward played into the hands of the conspirators, as Whitley had expected. He had been in the habit lately of having Whitley serve his dinner for him in his laboratory, and he followed that practice this evening.

At seven o'clock Whitley took his master's tray up from the kitchen to his sitting room. In the hall just outside of Ward's door he drew from his pocket a small envelope containing a white powder, which he emptied into the soup.

After serving the meal on a small table in the sitting room, he started for the door to retire until summoned to remove the dishes as was his usual custom. Then he turned back under the pretext of taking out one of Ward's suits for pressing, and managed to dally in the closet until Ward had finished his soup.

That was as far as Edison Ward went with that meal. When Whitley emerged from the closet, the young man was already sprawled unconscious across the table.

Whitley imperturbably picked him up and carried him into his bedroom, where he undressed the limp figure and placed it in the bed. Then he returned and cleared the table, disposing of the uneaten food in a sink in the laboratory. Thereupon after a suitable delay, he took the dishes down to the kitchen.

"Mr. Ward wished me to come back and do a little rearranging of his closets," he explained to Haskins, and returned to Ward's suite.

There he waited until the methodical Haskins and his corps of servants had retired, a little earlier than usual, and then, removing his shoes he slipped quietly down the back stairs to the servants' entrance and opening the door gave a low whistle. A moment later Coddington and Redfern appeared.

"We'll slip quietly upstairs in the dark, gentlemen," Whitley told them. "I dropped a bit of sleeping powder in the servants' coffeepot to-night, so I'll guarantee they're all dead to the world, but we'll be taking no chances. And I've the lights out in Mr. Ward's rooms, too. It 'll be just as well if you work with flash lights. So many queer things have happened around that suite of rooms lately that I'd not care to take any chances of you gentlemen being seen. You can search just as well with a flash light, and your faces won't be in evidence, or any light showing in the room."

Redfern gave Whitley an approving slap on the back, and the three tiptoed cautiously up the stairs and into the Ward suite. Whitley himself took his station by the side of the bed in which Ward lay in a drugged stupor.

He was provided with a sponge soaked in chloroform to use in case his master should come out of his unnatural slumber sooner than expected, or the search required more time than had been planned.

Coddington and Redfern, with small flash lights in hand, which shed no light except on the object which they were examining, went over every inch of the four walls of the suite. Every cabinet and closet was thoroughly inspected, especially for hidden recesses or secret drawers. Even the floor boards were gone over one by one, to make certain none was detachable.

Then, panel by panel, they made a systematic study of the walls of each room. No possibility of a hidden spring or lock was overlooked. It was half past three in the morning and the first faint flush of early summer sunrise was clearing in the east when they finished their search, and finished it in vain.

The three baffled men withdrew at last in order that the outsiders might get away from the house before daylight.

"I'm mighty sorry that you didn't succeed," Whitley told them, as they parted at the door. "It must be that Mr. Ward has a hiding place somewhere else in the house that none of us has thought about."

"All right, Whitley," Redfern assured him. "I don't blame you. You know too well what's good for you to try to double cross us. But we're going to come again, and next time young Mr. Ward himself is going to show us where he keeps his papers."

XI.

THE Ward household servants all overslept a little that morning, excepting the worthy Whitley, who was

around in the kitchen, virtuously getting his own breakfast when the cook came down, bleary-eyed and yawning.

"Seems like I never slept so hard in my life," she exclaimed, "and woke up with a headache, too. Nobody else up but you? What happened to Mr. Haskins that he didn't call us as usual this morning?"

The butler himself appeared a moment later trying to look dignified in spite of puffy eyelids, and the fact that he was an hour late in rising.

"I fancy my alarm didn't go off this morning," he exclaimed. "Well, we'll have to step lively now. Mr. Ward will be ringing for breakfast directly."

The other servants hurried in with similar excuses in the next few minutes.

But seven o'clock, Edison Ward's regular rising hour, came and went without the customary sounding of the buzzer. Haskins stared at the clock uneasily.

"Even Mr. Ward is oversleeping this morning," he remarked, with a tone of satisfaction at having his own dereliction so well supported. "If it were winter and the furnace going I should say we were all affected with coal gas. I wonder, Whitley, if Mr. Ward wouldn't like you to call him."

"I will do so presently," Whitley agreed, "if we do not hear from him."

But it was three-quarters of an hour before the familiar buzzer sounded, and when Ward appeared at breakfast, he appeared even more groggy than the rest of the disorganized household and had little appetite.

After breakfast he dragged himself slowly back to his suite, and lolled listlessly on the divan for a few moments, glancing over the newspaper. Then, finding himself nodding he pulled himself together with a jerk and paced the room to start his blood stirring.

"Getting groggy as the deuce, shut up like this," he grumbled. "I'll have to break out whether or no if things don't come to a head before long."

Half idly he wandered over to a small cabinet set against the wall, opened it and took out a roll of film from its back. He did the same thing to cabinets in each of the other three rooms.

"Might as well go through the forms as usual," he told himself. "I've been letting my friends, the plotters, slide the last two nights, while I was catching up on my other work. Well, if I've missed anything it'll all be here," and he disappeared in a dark room in the corner of his laboratory.

Some time later Edison Ward burst out of the dark room a changed man. His eyes were flashing with excitement, and all traces of the morning's grogginess had vanished. He had a large package under his arm which he hurriedly thrust into a suitcase and then going to the house-phone, called up the garage.

"Bring the closed car around directly," he ordered, "I'm going to the office to-day."

This sudden emerging from his supposed state of annihilation caused a buzz of excitement in the Ward household, and considerable secret anxiety on the part of Whitley, who could not help worrying lest this new move on his master's part might not have something to do with last evening's performance.

When Ward went down to the car he had the chauffeur draw the curtains in the hope that he might reach his office without being recognized on the way. He was successful as far as recognition was concerned, but was not able to escape the tide of public curiosity that swept around the Ward car when it appeared at the gate with the curtains so conspicuously down.

Ever since the first bomb threat a special guard of policemen and a special corps of newspaper men had haunted the front gate of the Ward grounds. These two professional groups were surrounded day and evening by a constantly shifting crowd of the curious public, which had been particularly large during the last two days since the

bombing of Ward's rooms, his supposed death, and the curious mystery connected with it.

Therefore, when the curtained Ward car emerged from the gates this morning newspaper men immediately flocked around it to see who was being spirited away in this surreptitious fashion. The fact that they were frustrated by the curtains and the car's immediate pick-up of speed only whetted their curiosity and their determination to find out what was what.

There was a break for the taxicabs, which the newsman held in readiness for just such an emergency. The crowd pricked up its ears. Wild and varied rumors flew through the throng.

As a result Edison Ward rode to his office between sidewalks lined with the curious, and passed rows of motors occupied by craning necks. The fact that none of the crowd could actually see him, made no difference to his state of mind. He shrank back in his seat as far as possible, feeling very much as he had on that one occasion when he had attempted to do some broadcasting over the radio, and had been so acutely conscious of the audience he could not see and who could not see him.

"About twenty-four hours more and I'll have this battle won," he told himself. "I'll get that confounded formula of mine into safe keeping; somebody who isn't a crook in charge of the works; that gang of bombers in jail; and then, by gad, I'm going away to the desert islands for a rest."

With that, a vision arose before his eyes—a vision of Marian Lord accompanying him on that runaway journey to an isle of bliss. But he sighed deeply and renounced the vision.

That was too much to hope for, and probably when he stepped off on the sands of that South Sea isle with his bride, a newspaper man with a camera would immediately pop out from behind a coconut palm, and from a neighboring rock a radio horn would begin telling the world about it.

He was still trying to renounce his vision when the car stopped before the door of his office and he was faced with the ordeal of suddenly coming back to life before an astonished throng that packed the sidewalk for a block each way. As his familiar face emerged from the car door, a hush of amazement fell upon the crowd.

Then there was a low murmur in crescendo, like the surf marching up a pebbly beach. It broke about him in a rending roar of applause.

And in the midst of his painful, shrinking embarrassment, Edison Ward was conscious of one thing that had never occurred to him before, and for the first time in his life, he had a vague glimmering of why his late father had loved the publicity that the son loathed.

The roar of the mob was a friendly roar.

Why, they were glad he was alive, Edison Ward thought, and in spite of himself, he thrilled with a new pride and feeling of oneness with his fellow man. It was worth the sacrifice of privacy after all, to experience that feeling at last.

For the first time in his life, instead of shrinking and hurrying through a throng with averted eyes, he raised his hat and bowed and smiled genially. And so, followed by the cheers of the multitude, Edison Ward pushed his way into the building and up the elevator.

Old Pete, the lobby attendant, looked up as he entered, gave a wild shriek of fright and collapsed on a bench. The girl at the information desk turned pale, deserted her post, and fled down the hall.

Edison Ward's old embarrassment flowed in on him in sharp reaction to his momentary feeling of elation. He hurried down his own private hall, toward his office, and then, by a half-unconscious instinct, as he passed the door of the little room occupied by Marian Lord, he pushed it open and entered without knocking.

Just inside the threshold he stopped in amazement. Marian Lord was not to be seen. A strange young woman was occupying her desk with an air of belonging there. She half leaped from her chair when she recognized the head of the company, then turned deathly pale and sank back, staring at him in helpless amazement.

"I beg of you don't be alarmed," he told her soothingly. "I am alive and in the flesh. Where is Miss Lord?"

"Why—why—" the girl stammered. "Miss Lord—left day before yesterday."

"Left!" Edison Ward shouted, in grieved surprise. "Left, what for?"

"Why, she left suddenly, and didn't say, but I heard she was going to be married."

At these words all the light of Edison Ward's new-born enthusiasm faded out of his day. He stood staring foolishly at his informant for a moment then turned and in a half daze found his way into his own office and dropped wearily into the chair behind his desk.

He sat there for some time with his face in his hands trying to think.

At length he pulled himself together firmly and got down to business with a grunt of disgust.

"Forget it, you fool!" he told himself; "you couldn't have expected anything else. If you had, you should have spoken to her long ago."

He picked up his telephone with savage vigor.

"Give me Inspector Curley at police headquarters," he told the girl.

"Time for a show-down, inspector," he told that official. "If you'd like to drop over to my office I'll give you some important dope."

"I'll be right over," the inspector agreed with alacrity.

While he was waiting for the inspector, Ward dictated a long statement into a dictograph and when the police official entered, he handed him the cylinder.

"Here is all I've got to say for today," he told him. "If you'll get that run back to you it 'll save us both a lot of time. I happen to have a pretty heavy schedule ahead of me this first day back from the tomb."

The officer grinned back at him and went out, taking the informative wax cylinder with him.

The telephone rang.

"Mr. Wainwright to see you," the girl announced.

Ward jumped up with real joy as the old chairman of the board came in. This was the first time Ward had seen the invalid outside of his sick room since his own father's funeral. He was a kindly gentleman nearly seventy-five years old. Of his integrity Edison Ward had never had a doubt, but he had feared his health would never permit him to give his administration any strong support.

"Well, Edison," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with emotion, "thank God you are safe after all. Tell me all about it. What a ghastly mistake! I admit I'm puzzled, though."

But before Ward could reply, the telephone rang again and Vice President Coddington and Morehouse, the secretary to the president, entered.

The latter was overwhelmed with real pleasure and astonishment and Edison Ward knew it was real now. He no longer suspected that this young man's distrust of Coddington was caused by his own jealousy and ambition.

XII.

CODDINGTON'S attempt to appear equally surprised and joyful filled Ward with secret glee. Coddington was an accomplished hypocrite; the recipient of his fulsome congratulations acted as if he took them at full value.

"I'm mighty glad to have you three gentlemen here together," Ward told them. "I've got something to show you a good deal more interesting than

myself. During my absence I completed my test work on the televisor and made a number of successful models. If you'll come into the projection room with me right now I'll show you some results that will amaze you."

He took up the big suitcase he had brought from home and the four of them went down to the little theater built for the purpose of testing the corporation's various products, on the second floor of the building.

From the suitcase he took a roll of film and placed it in one of the corporation's latest synchronizing projectors for talking motion pictures. He turned on the device with a word of explanation.

"This first exhibit shows how the televisor camera operates in a dim light over a short wire. The mirror was hung in the back of a fireplace in a room purposely lighted very poorly. I'm sure I could not have seen to read in it. It was simply suspended down the chimney from a single wire, by the way, without the knowledge of the regular occupants of the room. Which shows how the thing can be used in detective work. The recording camera was in my home just across half my yard from the little cottage where the mirror hung."

As he spoke, Ward was watching Coddington surreptitiously. He saw the vice president start and turn pale. He also noted in the back of the room near the door a police officer who had just entered, in response to one of the suggestions he had made to Inspector Curley in the memorandum he had dictated that morning. But Ward continued to act as though he were making a purely impersonal demonstration.

At first, the other two suspected nothing, as the arch-criminal Redfern was shown in the little living room of the Moran cottage playing with his radio dials. Then clearly came to their ears the sound of a soft knock at the door. They saw Redfern press the light button then start for the door.

"Notice that the camera works just as well in the dark as in the light," Ward explained. "This man has just switched off the light while he is opening the door. He does not wish any betraying gleams to shine out through the open door. The room is now plunged in absolute darkness as far as we are concerned with ordinary light which our own unaided eyes can see. But the camera works from the so-called black light ray from the little box at the back of the mirror in the fireplace. Notice the host has to lead his caller in. Now he is pressing the light button and illuminating the room again."

At this point the figure of the caller on the film turned and showed the face of Coddington. That person in the flesh beside Ward leaped to his feet. The other two, still unsuspicious of the real nature of the scene, looked at him and grinned.

"So you were in on this Coddington, you sly dog," Wainwright commented a little enviously.

"Mr. Coddington didn't know he was," Ward said dryly.

"This is a plant, a dirty piece of trick photography!" Coddington stormed. "I was not there."

"No, it's not a plant in the sense you mean, Mr. Coddington," Ward assured them. "I know this thing is all right, because I hung the mirror of this apparatus down the chimney myself a little earlier in the evening, while this gentleman, your host, was out, presumably summoning you to the meeting. I came across a convenient tree limb that bridges my wall and overhangs the roof of this house where your friend is staying. I happened to discover his secret residence the evening before while I was following one of his spies off my ground.

"His band were holding a secret meeting at the moment and I listened to a part of it from the chimney top. Unluckily, it cost the spy his life. He caught sight of me, and, as his gang

had exploded the bomb which supposedly killed me a little while before, he thought he saw a ghost. In his fright, he fell off and broke his neck."

"I won't stay and be insulted!" Coddington exclaimed and started for the door.

"You needn't," Ward told him coolly. "There's an officer there waiting to take you to the police station.

"I'll now have the pleasure of showing you in full just what our friend has been up to," Ward went on to the amazed pair remaining after Coddington had been led away by the officer.

They watched in fascinated horror while the whole scene enacted by Redfern, Coddington and finally Whitley, the valet, was run off on the screen, words and all.

When the reel was finished Morehouse and Wainwright stormed him with questions.

"Just let me show you some more films first," he told them. "They'll answer most of your queries. The next one is a scene enacted in my own rooms the following evening while I was sleeping from the effects of a drug administered by my valet, as I surmise now. I have one of these telltale mirrors in each of my rooms. The things are set to run automatically night and day and catch anything that happens there; another suggestion for the police. The conspirators worked in a perfectly dark room except for their flash lights, but that did them no good, as you see."

There followed a vivid portrayal of the thorough search made by the worthy three for Ward's secret documents.

"So much for that," Ward commented. "Now we'll see what I accomplished over my private telephone line between my house and my office. I took Miss Lord and one of the investigators from the Sax company into my confidence. The young man after a visit to my laboratory and careful instruction from me, came here to the building secretly in the night and fastened several of these mirrors with microphone attachments to the walls of the private offices whose occupants I wished particularly to watch. They are very clever little devices, very small and capable of being camouflaged to merge with any background. I won't bother you with a full showing now. Suffice it to say that I learned many things that I could never have found out in person on the spot, while I sat in my laboratory and watched and listened to my associates in the privacy of their offices.

"I am happy to say, Mr. Morehouse, that you came through clean. Of course Mr. Wainwright was not around to be inspected, but I knew where he stood. But as for Coddington, by watching him in his private office for two days I have a record recorded on films of the members of the office force who are with Coddington in his conspiracy. I even have photographs of damning secret documents he was so unfortunate as to lay out on his desk to read where the all-seeing eye of my little televisor could record them. I think I've shown you enough to convince you."

"You certainly have," Wainwright exclaimed and Morehouse seconded him.

"I am glad to feel sure of such backing," Ward assured them. "Now that I know the necessary facts for a housecleaning I am going to throw out the Coddington conspirators neck and crop. Then we'll have a reorganization and be ready for business. I'm going to ask you to continue as chairman of the board, Mr. Wainwright, but I want Mr. Morehouse to take my place as president. I don't care for active executive work and I particularly dislike the publicity that attends it. I want a chance to go away and enjoy a little privacy and go on with my inventive work. I suggest that Mr. Morehouse pick his own successor as secretary to the president. I'll now feel safe to

turn over to you my secret formula for the televisor."

"But what about this fiend Redfern's crazy gang of bombers?" Morehouse asked. "Was Redfern telling the truth when he said he had TNT planted in all our buildings ready to blow them up?"

Ward's face clouded.

"That's the big peril hanging over us. I'm afraid the fellow *was* telling the truth. That's the one job I have left to clean up. I've taken the police in on that. Inspector Curley has been asked to put a big corps of his best operatives on the case and get coöperation of the police force in other cities where our plants are located. I'm hoping we'll strike before Redfern realizes that he has been checkmated in his other schemes and blows up the plants out of revenge. To-night I hope to direct personally a raid on the little cottage where they have their local headquarters and catch all the ringleaders of the gang, including Redfern himself."

"I pray God you'll be successful," the old chairman breathed fervently.

XIII.

THE rest of the day Edison Ward spent picking up the threads of his work at the office and keeping in hourly touch with the police inspector who was searching for the deadly explosives with which Redfern had threatened the destruction of the International Radio Corporation. He worked with the sense of being over a volcano that might momentarily erupt.

He was strongly moved to close down the plants and send all the employees home till the danger was over. But he dared not do that for fear Redfern's spies would report the first move in that direction and, realizing that it meant their plot was discovered, the fiend would be likely to touch the fatal button which he boasted would send all the buildings to destruction at once.

Toward mid afternoon Ward got his first confirmation of this phase of the plot and at the same time positive hope of nipping it in a wholesale way.

In the basement of the very office building in which Ward's offices were located, the police found buried enough TNT to blow the entire building to fragments. And attached to it was a delicate apparatus evidently so designed that the explosive could be fired by a certain radio impulse from a distance.

That gave Edison Ward a hopeful theory, just a theory that might not work, but worth trying as a possible safeguard. Of course, Redfern might have several radio sending sets from any one of which he might broadcast the death-dealing impulse. But the chances were that he had such a set in the little Moran cottage headquarters and would plan to detonate his charges from there.

A premature raid on the cottage would, of course, be useless and dangerous. If the arch conspirator were not caught, he might promptly fire the charge from another point.

But what Ward could do was to start the powerful set he had installed in his own house and make Redfern's set useless by interference waves. He hurried home and put this plan into execution at once.

Then he spent the rest of the afternoon in his laboratory, conferring with the police by phone and keeping watch of the little Moran cottage living-room over his televisor whose mirror still hung in the back of the fireplace undiscovered by the conspirators.

But at no time during the day did he see anything of Redfern or his fellow-conspirators. Before evening TNT was unearthed in three other widely scattered plants of the International Radio Corporation.

That much of the concern's property was therefore made secure, but the great bulk of it, together with thousands of lives, should the fiend strike in

the daytime, was still unprotected. And when night came and still no one appeared in the Moran cottage, Ward's worry increased.

He feared it might indicate they had transferred their headquarters and might strike from an unknown spot.

Nevertheless, as soon as dusk came, Inspector Curley sent out a corps of men to the Ward block and prepared to close in on the cottage as soon as Ward gave the word.

He had his dinner sent up to the laboratory that night and ate it hastily with his eyes on his battery of televisor mirrors. On one side of him was the mirror connected with the interior of the cottage and on the other the largest one of his set, a circular affair about three feet in diameter, lying flat on a table-top.

Seen with the naked eye this mirror was not a mirror at all, inasmuch as it did not reflect anything in the room where it was located. It seemed simply to glow dully from a light beneath it. But Ward was studying it through a magnifying glass screwed to his eye.

Viewed this way it presented a picture of the entire Ward grounds and their immediate vicinity, camera obscura fashion. It was connected by wire with the top of the tallest chimney on the house where under cover of darkness Ward had installed a small circular concave receiving mirror.

Seen through the glass at Ward's eye, every detail of the premises was registered. Here and there were signs of movement. Without the magnifying lens they might have been flies crawling about under the surface of the glass, but thus magnified, they proved to be men.

Edison Ward had met and carefully noted each one of the men Inspector Curley had assigned to the job of protecting the Ward place, and on this particular night, of raiding the little Moran cottage. One of his objects now, in thus keeping track of the field of action, was to identify all the men in sight, make any suggestions that occurred to him as to their strategic positions viewed from this bird's-eye standpoint, but most of all to make certain that none of the plotters themselves should mingle in with the police.

As he studied the panorama, therefore, he held the transmitter of the house phone in front of him, connecting through to Inspector Curley who was this evening stationed in the servants' quarters of the Ward home in person, directing the movement. Now and then Ward had a suggestion to make to the inspector, as to the disposition of the men, which that official carried out through one of his staff who stood at his elbow and acted as orderly.

It was a time of intense suspense. While Edison Ward's physical eye was cast over the panorama of the little territory around him, including the interior of the plotters' rendezvous, he was seeing in his mind's eye that imposing array of great factory buildings of the Radio Corporation which were not yet surely safe from a possible attack by Redfern's dread explosive.

As moment by moment slipped by, he feared that at any one of them, he might hear poured forth from the radio across the room a news announcement of such a catastrophe. That fear increased as time went on, and he continued to note no sign of life in the living room of the cottage, or about the little hedge-inclosed yard.

But, at length, after over an hour of this trying vigil, his pulse quickened with interest when he saw on the panorama view the tiny figure of a man coming through the little gate in the rear hedge of the Moran premises. The man stepped up to the door on the porch, and rapped softly.

From the audiphone under the other mirror connected with the interior of the house, Ward got the sound of the rap, and a moment later saw the stairway door leading into the living-room open and Redfern emerge.

Ward sighed with intense satisfac-

tion and relief. A large part of the suspense was removed when the arch conspirator was thus located.

From the man's previous statement, Ward was quite certain that no hand but Redfern's own would set off any of the deadly charges under the Radio Corporation's buildings. Ward was equally confident that the strong radio waves that he was sending out from his own broadcasting instrument's antennæ on the roof of the old mansion, would overwhelm any impulse that Redfern might try to broadcast from the instrument in the little cottage.

He watched while Redfern admitted his caller, at the same time reporting the fact over the telephone to Inspector Curley. The caller was a nondescript young fellow, whom Ward recalled having seen before in the group around Redfern.

"Good," he heard Redfern say now. "Glad to see you around early, Martin. I wanted a little scout work done over on the Ward premises. Suppose you slip over and make sure that there's nothing unusual stirring over there to-night. We don't want to get ready to pull any stuff again unless we can be sure we are going to get away with it. The rest of the gang will be here in a few minutes now. They get nasty when they come expecting action and don't get it."

The spy started for the roof to follow the usual route by way of the tree limb over the wall into the Ward grounds. Redfern settled down by the radio set and began listening to reports coming in.

Ward turned to the telephone and spoke to Inspector Curley again.

"Redfern is there in the meeting-room now, and his man Martin has just come in, and has been sent over into our grounds on a scouting expedition. They are 'evidently planning something for to-night. I would advise not interfering with Martin. If he is arrested and doesn't return to the Moran cottage on time, it may arouse Redfern's suspicion and balk us again. I think you'd better hide your men who are on station as much as possible, and have the rest be sure not to see Martin. Let him think that we feel secure and careless and go back if he wants to."

"Good suggestion, Mr. Ward," Curley agreed, and sent his orderly out around the grounds to instruct the men accordingly.

Another group of men were in concealment in a little park in the block beyond the Ward grounds, waiting for the word to close in on the Moran cottage from that side. One of these men was at a police phone in this park, keeping it open and in touch with Curley.

"Have your men up on tiptoe, and ready to jump in a few minutes now," Curley sent word to this outside contingent.

Up in the little laboratory Ward was turning his eye alternately from the big panorama mirror to the one showing the cottage interior and back again, now watching the progress of Redfern's spy, Martin, about the grounds, and now noting with satisfaction the rapid gathering of the Redfern clan within the little room.

The moment the last of the gang arrived, and before Redfern had a chance to start anything, Ward would speak the word over the phone to Curley, and the inspector would, with the same breath, pass the order on over the field phone to the outside force, and through his orderly to those within the Ward grounds. Then, with a concerted rush, the two forces would close in on the little cottage and Redfern's days of plotting and bombing would be over for good.

Then, suddenly, something happened to upset these calculations. Ward was intently eying Redfern by means of the little mirror suspended in the Moran fireplace, when suddenly as he watched this arch criminal in the little transmitting mirror at his elbow, it seemed as though he were looking di-

rectly into the fellow's very eyes, as though they were standing face to face with each other.

Redfern, who at that moment was standing at the far end of the little living room, waiting for the last of his gang to arrive, suddenly strode forward toward the fireplace, which was, of course, Ward's viewpoint.

The figure of Redfern grew larger and larger until his face seemed to fill the whole picture in the little mirror on Ward's table, and it was a face distorted by sudden rage. Redfern's hands seemed to come between his face and the mirror.

Then suddenly the mirror went blank!

Edison Ward knew at once what had happened. He snatched up the house phone.

"Beans are spilled, inspector. Just now Redfern discovered my mirror in the fireplace and tore it out. Better pull your raid quick before they can make a get-away."

The inspector barked his orders accordingly, and Ward watched the charge upon the Moran cottage through the panorama mirror which was still in operation, but he knew in an instant that it was too late. Several minutes before Curley's men got within striking distance, he saw a file of conspirators emerge from the door of the little cottage and disappear through the hedge in the rear.

He reported the fact to Curley, but there was nothing the inspector could do about it. When the police reached the little cottage it was empty and silent.

XIV.

Edison Ward was down to breakfast early the next morning, but not because he had any interest in breakfast. He had passed a sleepless night, having sat up and kept in constant touch with Inspector Curley through the night, and with news radio reports.

It had been a night of intense excitement and supreme suspense. With the flight of the Redfern gang from their headquarters in the little cottage, it seemed as though the spirit of anti-publicity fanaticism had broken loose and spread like a swift contagion throughout the country.

The paper this morning was full of stories of outrages in many States, all by fanatics claiming to belong to the crusade in defense of privacy. In most instances it was evident on the surface that these were sporadic outbreaks of cranks, inspired by the news stories of Redfern's secret organization.

It was not merely that riotous anti-publicity meetings were held in many cities in which the public were exhorted to rise up and destroy every radio outfit in the country, and even in some cases extending the attack to the telephone and telegraph, and moving pictures. But this wave of lunacy did not stop there. Three different big broadcasting stations were bombed during the night, and heavy charges of explosives were found in two others. Another mine of TNT was unearthed under the Detroit plant of the International Radio Corporation.

But, apparently, Redfern had not pressed his secret button, whether or not his sudden flight from the Moran cottage was responsible. For none of the Radio Corporation's buildings were wrecked as yet. While Edison Ward was naturally thankful for that fact, it nevertheless meant that his state of suspense was continuing, and this, with the strain of a sleepless night, was wearing his nerves almost to the breaking point.

He was particularly annoyed when he entered the dining room that morning to find the place in disorder. A strange young man in workman's overalls was squatting in the corner, fussing with the telephone wire that ran along the molding.

Haskins hurried in apologetically.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to Ward. "You came down a little earlier than

usual this morning, sir. The young man thought he could finish his work before you came in. You see I tried to telephone and there was trouble on the line, so I sent for a repair man, and he located the trouble here.

"You will kindly withdraw until Mr. Ward has his breakfast," Haskins continued, turning to the repair man, who got up grudgingly from the floor, shoved his kit of tools up against the wall and went out.

Haskins bustled about setting the room in order and continuing his apology, while Ward read his paper.

"Well, of all the nerve!" Haskins exclaimed suddenly, and picked up the telephone man's bag of tools, "leaving this 'ere in plain sight while you eat, sir. I must apologize again."

Haskins, still muttering, carried the bag out to the kitchen.

"Where's that bloke from the telephone company?" he demanded.

"He said he'd go out on the grounds and smoke while Mr. Ward had breakfast," the cook told him.

"Well, he needn't have left his dirty bag around here for us to stumble over," Haskins grumbled, and, opening the rear door, he set it out in the service yard, after noting that the telephone employee was nowhere in sight.

Haskins had barely returned to the breakfast room when there came a sudden ripping explosion from just outside the house. Windows were shattered all around. The door of the servants' entrance was blown from its hinges, and the kitchen walls as well as those of several adjoining rooms were stripped of plaster.

Ward and Haskins rushed out together through the servants' entrance. Out in the service yard, where Haskins had left the telephone repair man's bag of tools, there was a ragged hole in the ground like the crater of a small volcano. The shrubbery for several rods around it was torn and broken.

"Good Lord!" Edison Ward exclaimed. "Haskins, if you hadn't been grouchy this morning and put that fellow's bag outside, we'd all be dead, and there wouldn't be anything but rubbish left of the old house. I remember now where I'd seen that repair man before. I thought his face was familiar when I came in to breakfast. Do you remember, Haskins, that afternoon before the evening in which I was supposedly bumped off by a bomb in my room, there was something wrong with the telephone wires then?"

"I do remember, sir," Haskins exclaimed. "And I remember this young man, too, now you speak of it. He was the man that was sent up that afternoon to repair it, and he said the trouble was in your suite of rooms, and when you came home you took him in long enough to fix it."

"Right," Ward approved. "And now I begin to see a solution of the mystery that has been troubling me as well as the police and you ever since that bombing. We've all wondered how a man could get into my private rooms through dead bolted doors, pull a wisecrack over the radio, and then throw a bomb and get out again still through dead bolted doors, and not get hurt himself, or leave any trace of himself behind excepting the explosion.

"Well, this young telephone man is the answer, of course. He brought some kind of infernal machine in his bag of tools, and managed to tuck it away in that little room almost under my very nose. Now let me see if I can find anything scattered around the yard that will tell me how the trick was pulled."

Ward spent half an hour picking up small fragments about the grounds, and at the end of that time had collected not only the pieces of the cast-iron shell as before, but enough bits of glass, coils of wire, and other attendant apparatus, to reconstruct a small portable radio set, if it had been possible to put it all together again.

"There's the answer," he told Haskins, pointing at the pile of rubbish. "It's surprising that I didn't think of it before. This thing this young fellow brought in to-day and the thing he hid in my room before were the same kind of outfit in each case, a portable radio set with a bomb attachment connected with a little device that would touch off the bomb when a key word was spoken over the radio. There you have the answer to the mystery.

"All our friend Redfern had to do was to send this message of his around with the outfit; then he could sit back, and at the right moment speak the key word over the radio and explode the bomb. That explains how this bomber could apparently be talking to me, right in the room where I was broadcasting, and yet not be there at all. They probably balled up our phones for the purpose each time by impulses from their sending set."

Haskins was looking at him still a little puzzled.

"But you yourself were not there at all, sir," the butler made bold to demur, "although, according to the radio, you also seemed to be talking from there."

"Ah, that's another story, which perhaps we'll explain later," Edison Ward laughed. "I may want to do that stunt again, and I've found it isn't safe to talk around here," he added with a glance in the direction of Whitley, who was looking on curiously, with an effort not to appear too interested.

Ward had forborne to have Whitley arrested as an accomplice of Coddington, and had had Coddington's arrest kept secret so far, for fear of warning off the man Redfern, who was still at large somewhere and active as the little pile of fragments of this infernal machine eloquently testified.

XV.

THE report of this last explosion in the Ward home got into the radio and the newspapers almost immediately that morning, and public excitement reached a fever pitch by noon. Edison Ward followed the council of discretion and stayed on the premises, about which Inspector Curley maintained a heavy and vigilant guard.

There were reports and rumors of rioting and disorder connected with anti-publicity demonstrations in various parts of the country throughout the day, and several times bomb outrages were reported in various sections.

All day long Edison Ward again waited breathlessly for reports of explosions in some of the company's plants, and the same state of suspense continued through the following night. But when a second day dawned and nothing further had happened, he began to breathe a little more easily.

Meantime TNT mines in two more plants, with radio firing attachments, had been found and removed, and on the third day the last of the corporation's plants were freed from that menace.

Meantime, Inspector Curley had continued his vigilance about the Ward home. Plainclothes men stayed in the little Moran cottage night and day for several days, but found never a sign of any attempt on the part of Redfern or any member of his gang to return.

Gradually it began to look as though the arch conspirator, having made one more attempt and failed, and having been warned by discovering the potency of the secret devices by which Edison Ward was able to watch his movements, had abandoned his crusade for good.

The young telephone man, after leaving his murderous package, had quietly faded from sight and had not been seen again. Whitley, the valet, was unostentatiously arrested on the charge of conspiring with Coddington, and placed in jail, after vigilant

shadowing of him for a week failed to reveal any attempt on Redfern's part to get in touch with him.

So at length Inspector Curley decided that the game was over, and withdrew his men from around the Ward place, with the exception of a single plainclothes man, who hung about perfunctorily now and then.

Meanwhile Edison Ward had completed the business of setting in motion the reorganization machinery of the corporation, and was about ready to leave things in the hands of the new triumvirate and settle down in his laboratory to enjoy the quiet privacy of an inventor's life.

But Edison Ward was not happy. Far from it. The more time that elapsed since the day when Marian Lord disappeared out of his life, the more keenly he missed her.

On the evening in which he had completed his arrangements for dropping the active management of the corporation, he came home heartily sick of life. After a hasty dinner he went up to his laboratory, and tried to distract his mind by an evening of reading.

A little later he remembered something that he should have told Morehouse. He stepped to the phone to get the new president's number, but found it dead. He tried another instrument with the same result. The house phone refused to work.

Telephone out of order had meant danger recently. Not a little perturbed, Ward went to his door and called for Haskins. There was no answer.

With increasing alarm he went down to the servants' wing and found no one there. A search of the house revealed the ominous fact that he was absolutely alone in it.

Ward stood in the center of the lower hall, baffled and undecided. There was no doubt in his mind that this was another blow of Redfern's.

That clever and powerful plotter had cut the telephone connections and somehow lured his servants away. Should he walk boldly out to the street and summon the police? He would probably never be allowed to get there.

He was still standing there, wavering in his mind, when there came a hurried rap at the big open front door only a few feet from him. His heart missed a beat. He had no gun with him, and there was nothing around that would serve, conveniently, as a weapon. Was this the signal for an attack?

Again the hurried rap, and a frantic rattle at the door. Ward rushed up to his own suite four steps at a time and secured an automatic which he kept there always loaded. Then he raced down again to the front door, determined to face the issue promptly, and shoot any one on sight who looked suspicious.

Automatic in hand, he unlocked the door swiftly and suddenly snapped it open. Then he staggered back in amazement.

Marian Lord rushed into the room and slammed the door behind her!

In his surprise, Edison Ward dropped the automatic clattering to the floor.

"Marian!" he exclaimed, and involuntarily held out both hands.

"Edison!" she cried in return. And before either realized what they were doing, they were in each other's arms.

But in an instant, the girl drew back.

"We mustn't!" she exclaimed. "Quick, they're coming! They'll kill you this time! They're all around the place!"

"But I thought you were married!" irrelevantly interrupted the still dazed Edison Ward.

"Nonsense! I've been kidnaped and kept in an old cellar by that fiend of a Redfern. He spread the report that I was married. I overheard their plot and escaped to-night. They got the servants away by tricks and held them. They're going to torture you until you give up your televisor secret, and then kill you. Oh, what shall I do?"

Far from seeming particularly alarmed or filled with despair, Edison Ward appeared strangely elated. He took Marian firmly by the arm.

"Just run up to my laboratory with me and I'll show you what we will do," he told her.

"But they'll just trap us up there," she told him. "Of course you can lock us in, but then they'll set fire to the house."

"Just do as I tell you," Edison Ward said masterfully, suddenly stripped of his overpowering shyness in Marian Lord's presence.

A moment later they were shut in the suite upstairs, with a heavy steel door and window shutters dead bolted on the inside. Ward took her over to the table where the panorama mirror lay and gave her a magnifying glass, while he took the other.

Wonderingly, she studied the moving picture spread out before her. All around the grounds they could see the tiny figures of men stealing forward through the shrubbery. The special policeman who should have been guarding the gate had gone. Nowhere was there any one in sight except members of Redfern's band.

"I see where they cut the telephone wires!" Ward exclaimed, pointing at a spot near the south garden wall with a tip of his pencil.

Over against the wall, at short intervals all around the grounds, men were stationed, evidently with the purpose of allowing no one to slip out, while others were advancing stealthily toward the house.

Ward reached into a cabinet and selected a small telephone set with a short wire attached and slipped it into his pocket.

"We may need this," he told the puzzled girl, with a cheerful grin. "And before we go I'd better take out one or two things so that in case they search the place more carefully this time they won't learn all my little secrets, particularly this one that I may want to use again if I ever have to do any more broadcasting."

He took her into the little inner room, where the microphone stood. The wall in this room was covered with steel plates riveted together, and backed by hollow tile.

Under the spot where the microphone wire disappeared through the wall he picked out four supposedly solid rivets with his finger-tips, releasing one of the plates, and exposing a good sized niche behind it, made by the simple process of removing some of the tiles. From that niche he took out a gramophone and set it on the table before the bewildered girl, detaching a little electric motor, and a wire that had been cut into the telephone wire.

"That accounts for how I could be broadcasting in this room that night and yet not be killed by the bomb; in fact, it explains how at that moment I could be out spying around, and discovering Mr. Redfern's headquarters. You see, I just dictated my address to a phonograph, hitched it to an electric motor; put another microphone with it, and stuck the whole thing into this niche in the wall, where I just had the second microphone cut in on the telephone wire, to which the first one is attached. So you see, I wouldn't be embarrassed at all by delivering my speech over the radio. In fact, here was a case where I could set my mouth going and go away and leave it, which I did."

"But we've got to go away now!" exclaimed the agitated girl, "or it will be too late. I don't see how you went away then, with everything locked like this, nor how you're going to go away now."

"I'm going away now with you this time, just the same way that I went alone then," he assured her, and led her out to the sitting room of the suite, to a point in the wall, where a big old-fashioned chimney, some eight feet wide, jutted a full three feet out into the room.

It was covered over with plaster and the high oak wainscoting panels like the rest of the room.

"A lot of people lately have tapped the panels over that chimney," he commented with a grin, "but they didn't hear any hollow sound, or find any secret springs. Those panels set tight against concrete and steel and they haven't any ordinary secret springs. My ingenious dad fixed this up years ago in order to provide for a combination of a secret wall safe and a secret fire escape."

So saying, he leaned his full weight against the left-hand panel on the front of the chimney. This panel and its concrete backing gave way slightly, so little that Marian Lord would not have noticed it if she had not been watching closely.

But it released the hidden lock of the right-hand panel adjoining it, which was really a door with concealed hinges. Clutching with his finger tips the molding between the two panels, Ward pried at it till the secret door swung stiffly open, revealing the face of a modern burglar-proof wall safe.

With practiced fingers, Ward spun the dial of the combination and opened the door. From an inner drawer he drew a sealed envelope and thrust it in his pocket.

"There," he said, "is the secret televisor formula that everybody's having so much fuss over. I'll just take it along to make it absolutely safe."

At that instant, they heard, even through the nearly sound-proof wall, the crash of outside doors being burst open, and then the rumble of many feet hurrying up the stairs. The next instant there was a crashing blow, as of an ax against the steel door of the suite.

Marian Lord clutched Ward's arm impulsively.

"It's all right," he reassured her with a smile. "They won't find us here when they come in."

He shut the safe door and locked it. Then, grasping the handle of the door firmly, he braced himself and pulled.

To Marian Lord's amazement, the heavy safe rolled noiselessly out into the room on well oiled and concealed ball-bearing and rubber-tired casters, between two extending steel guiding arms that kept it in line. Behind it yawned an entrance into the big chimney.

The partitions between its flues had been removed, leaving ample room for the passage of a human being down an iron ladder that was spiked against the brickwork.

Ward motioned Marian into the opening behind the safe and followed her himself. He turned on a flash light and helped her on to the iron ladder. When she was down out of the way he followed, and as soon as his head was below the floor level he threw over a lever that protruded from the interior of the chimney wall.

The safe automatically trundled back into position over his head, and the panel door shut after it.

The big chimney connected with a long abandoned fireplace in the kitchen below, and with an old Dutch oven in the cellar which had not been used for an equally long time. A minute later Marian Lord and Edison Ward crawled out of the Dutch oven and let themselves out through a rear cellar door into the dark grounds.

"Now, just hang on to my arm and come along," he whispered. "Most of the gang are inside the house now, and the rest are stationed out along the walls to keep anybody from getting out or in. I want to find the place where that telephone line is cut. I got it pretty well located on the mirror upstairs."

Silently, they felt their way out through the shrubbery. They could hear faint sounds of the battering at the steel door upstairs in the dark old house behind them. There were the muffled murmurs of the voices of the attacking party within.

A few minutes later Ward, feeling around in a clump of bushes which he had located in studying the picture upstairs, found the end of the cut telephone wire, and in less than a minute had spliced on to it the end of the wire of the little pocket telephone transmitter and receiver he had brought along with him; and in a half a minute more he had Inspector Curley at police headquarters on the wire, and was talking to him in a low whisper.

Presently he stopped and let the phone fall. Then, putting an arm gently around Marian, he drew her down to a seat hidden under a sheltering shrub, where they were safe from the prying eyes of the raiding gang of watchers by the wall.

"Now, dear," he whispered, "all we've got to do is to wait till Inspector Curley's gang arrives and surrounds this place. Then it will be all over but the shouting. He's going to send a young army, and they'll come very quietly.

In a few minutes these yeggs will find themselves outnumbered about ten to one, and Redfern's conspiracy will be at an end."

And it turned out just as Edison Ward predicted. There was some sharp firing for a few minutes after the officers arrived, but the attack was so sudden and so unexpected, that the resistance was brief and futile. Redfern himself stepped out of a side door of the house to see what the noise was about, and ignominiously walked into the arms of two officers. He was in handcuffs before he knew what was happening.

A little while later when Edison Ward and Marian Lord were on their way home in a taxicab with the chauffeur who seemed oblivious to everything but his business of driving, Edison whispered, after a considerable period of silence:

"Marian, do you think you will be able to stand the life of publicity that you would have to lead with me?"

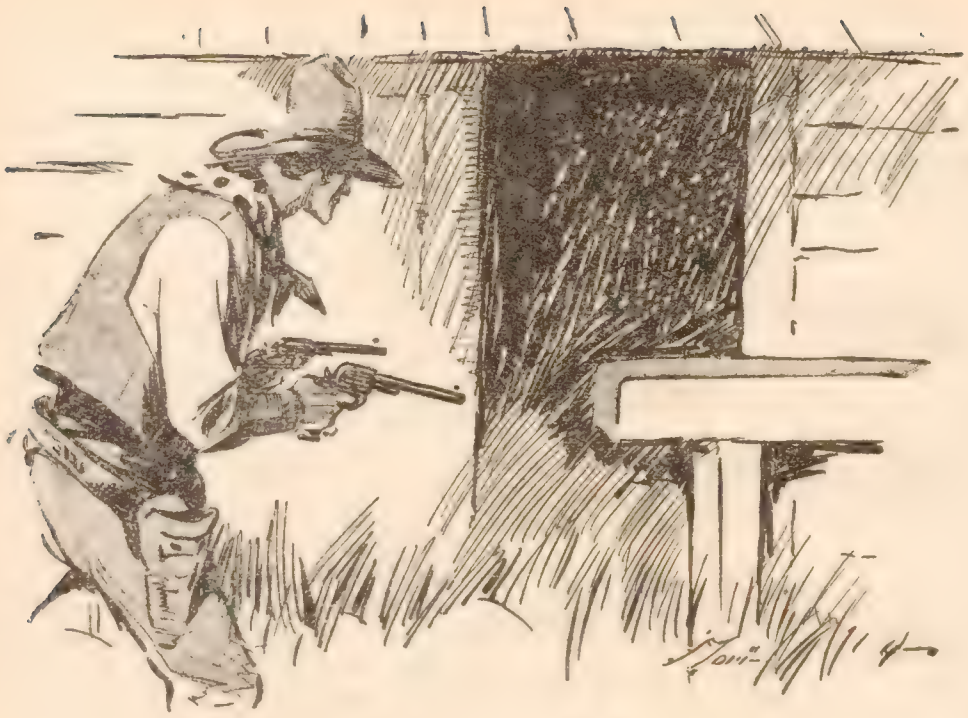
"Oh, I'm not worried about that," she said, snuggling a little closer. "Of course, I'll want a lot of publicity at the wedding. Every woman does. Then I want just as much privacy on our honeymoon, which is another thing every woman wants, and I know a lovely little place we can slip away to and nobody will ever dream we are there. Then I want to live happy ever after in a nice happy medium of publicity and privacy."

"But how will you manage that last?" Ward asked her.

"Oh, I won't need to manage that," she said. "Just let human nature take its course. Before you've been shut up with me in your comfy little laboratory for a year, everybody'll forget how your face looks, particularly after I've taken you to a nice facial surgeon I know about, and had that old scar removed, which is the principal thing that strangers remember about your face, and the only thing I don't like about it."

And Marian had her way. Also her prophecy came true.

THE END



Two-Gun Magic

When Solitaire Stevens followed that first hunch, he let himself in for more things than he expected, but he didn't waste any time worrying about it. He got right into action.

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Author of the Whistling Waddy Stories.

CHAPTER I.

DEADLY DARKNESS.

FROM somewhere within the dark and deserted-looking ranch house came a faint sound stealing through the ominous silence of the night to linger in the mind of the man who heard it. A faint croaking whisper, that had been all. The words were uttered in too low a tone for him to understand their meaning.

"Solitaire" Stevens, known from one end of the range to the other as the Whistling Waddy, crouched at the side of the open front door, a heavy revolver in each hand, his strong face grim and set as he tried to peer into the darkness beyond. Even though his eyes were swiftly becoming accustomed to the gloom he could see nothing in the blackness which shrouded the interior of the big rambling house.

Again he heard the soft weird whisper. It was followed by a faint scuffling sound as though two persons were struggling, silently and desperately. Finally there came a low groan and then a heavy thud as though some bulky object had fallen to the floor.

Stevens hesitated no longer. Cautiously he made his way into the house, making every effort to move without sound. He went slowly, for he feared

he might run into something in the darkness which would betray his presence. His lips were puckered in the form they assumed when he was about to issue that soft, mournful whistle which had brought him his name, but now no sound came from them.

Once he paused and stood for a moment listening tensely, but the place was strangely silent. As his eyes grew more and more used to the darkness he began to make out grotesque-shaped objects which he knew were the furnishings of a room.

Frowning, he moved forward again. He had not gone far when he came in contact with a table near the wall. He returned one of his guns to its holster, then felt about the table's surface with his free left hand.

As he did so he nearly knocked over a tall oil lamp, but he steadied it quickly with his fingers. He felt in his pocket for a match, then remained motionless for an instant debating whether he dared light the lamp.

He realized that in doing so he was taking a long chance, for he felt that death lurked somewhere amid the silence of this house. Solitaire Stevens was a brave man, but he was not inclined to take any foolish risks. Yet he knew that only by lighting the lamp might he hope to learn what had taken place amid the darkness.

He edged around the table so that his back was against the wall, then struck a match and reached over hastily and lit the lamp. As its glow flooded the room with light the whistling waddy looked about him anxiously, the gun in his hand ready for instant action. A feeling of chagrin swept over him as a quick glance told him that he was apparently alone.

Then as he relaxed to a degree he began a more extensive scrutiny of his surroundings. He found that he was in a large, comfortably furnished room, and that the fittings of the place were far superior to those which were usually found in the ranch houses in that section of the old roaring West of bygone days.

The furniture had evidently been imported from the East, for it was of excellent quality. Solitaire had traveled far in his wanderings, always whistling and alone, and he realized the furniture's worth, as he did the framed reproductions of some of the world's greatest works of art which hung upon the walls.

In a corner of the room which was some distance from the door through which Stevens had entered stood a heavy roll-top mahogany desk. Beyond this was a window, open now, the white lace curtains which hung at either side of it fluttering in the faint breeze.

As he looked about him the tall two-gun waddy continued to frown. His instinctive feeling that there was something wrong lingered. The whispers he had heard, and the faint sounds of what had seemed to be a struggle remained fresh in his mind. He would have sworn it had all come from this room, yet there seemed to be no one here now.

He moved toward the desk with the intention of peering out of the window, but before he reached it he halted abruptly and stood staring down. From behind the left side of the desk he had caught a glimpse of a pair of heavy black riding boots, their toes pointing upward.

With a muttered exclamation Solitaire stepped around the end of the desk. He stopped again as he found himself gazing down at the pale face of an elderly gray-haired man. It was the latter's expression that had caused the waddy's ejaculation. There was something ghastly in the stare of horror that lingered upon the white face even in death.

Stevens knelt beside the man, thrusting his other gun back into its holster as he did so. Swiftly he examined the body for any possible signs of life. There were none, the man was dead, though he had not been that way very

long. Solitaire realized this as he stood up, his brain working swiftly.

This was murder, but who had done it and how? His eyes searched the still form for some sign of a wound. There was no blood on the man's clothing, which, save for the heavy riding boots, was of decidedly fashionable Eastern cut.

Then the sight of an angry red mark about the man's throat answered the question in Stevens's mind as to how he had died. He had been brutally choked to death by some one possessing unusual strength, but by whom? That was what the whistling waddy wanted to know.

From those strange croaking whispers he had heard, the faint sounds of a struggle, he was quite sure that he had heard a murder being committed as he had lingered there at the doorway of the house. If such was the case, then what had become of the murderer?

Something made him turn quickly in the direction of the window. As he did so he caught a glimpse of a shadowy face staring into the room, but it was gone before he could see it clearly. Swiftly Solitaire dashed to the lamp. In an instant he had blown it out and the room was once again in black darkness.

With noiseless, catlike steps the two-gun man made his way back to the window. When he reached it he stood peering out into the yard about the ranch house. He could see clearly, for the moon had risen and the surrounding country was bathed in its mellow glow.

There was no one near the window now, he was quite sure of that. A short distance from the house was a little clump of trees, and beyond these were the square, shaded forms of the barns and the bunk house with the corral on their left.

As he stood there staring out Stevens's cold blue eyes narrowed. In the shadows near the edge of the trees he had caught sight of a weird figure. It was that of a huge man, but now it was crawling along on hands and knees like some strange animal.

Swiftly Solitaire drew his guns and covered the crawling man. He was just about to fire when from behind him there came the soft, croaking whisper that he had heard before.

He turned in the direction of the sound. It seemed to have come from the vicinity of the front door. As he stood staring through the darkness, the door abruptly swung shut and he heard the latch click. He glanced out the window again. The crawling figure was gone; there was no one in sight.

Slowly, with both guns ready for action, the waddy moved toward the front door of the ranch house, his face grim and set. He paused again and stood motionless, listening as he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs outside the door, and then a jingle of spurs as a rider dismounted.

Solitaire suddenly realized that he was in a dangerous position. He was a total stranger in this part of the country, and to be found alone in the darkness of this ranch house with a man who had obviously been murdered would require a good bit of explanation.

He had grave doubts as to any one believing the truth at that. To state that he had caught sight of the ranch in the distance, and after tying his mount in a little shelter of trees some two hundred yards away, had made his way to the house on foot merely as a whim was a very doubtful story.

Any one would want to know upon hearing it why he had not ridden up to the house as any peacefully inclined puncher would have done instead of hiding his horse amid the trees. Solitaire did not know the answer himself; it had been merely an unexplainable hunch on his part that had caused him to do so.

Abruptly there came the sound of some one knocking at the closed front door loudly and insistently.

"Major Marsh," a man's voice called. "It's Lomond; let me in—I must see you at once."

Stevens hesitated but an instant. He wanted to know all about what had happened in this house that night, but he did not wish to be found there then. Noiselessly he made his way to the open window and climbed out.

As his feet touched the ground he stared about him, guns again ready for action, but there was no one in sight. Slowly he edged in along the wall toward the front of the house, keeping always in the shadow of the overhanging roof above his head.

As he reached the corner Solitaire removed his heavy black Stetson and peered cautiously around. A roan horse stood a short distance from the house, its head drooping as though it had been ridden hard and far.

The pounding on the front door continued, and Stevens glanced in that direction. A tall, slender man stood at the door calling insistently for Major Marsh.

He was dressed in a long frock coat of ancient vintage, and his dark trousers were thrust into the tops of heavy boots upon which were fastened ornate Mexican spurs.

From the distance Solitaire could not see the man's face clearly, for it was shaded by a broad-brimmed hat, but it appeared to be unusually white and hawklike.

As the waddy watched, the door of the house was suddenly opened from within. Solitaire caught a glimpse of a strange, hunchbacked figure, and then the tall man stepped into the house and the door closed.

As it did so Stevens uttered very softly the mournful whistle which always came from his lips when he was intensely interested in something.

Like a gliding shadow he moved toward the trees where he had left his little horse. The whistling waddy was heading for the nearest town to try and learn all that he could about a man named Major Marsh, and a tall hombre whom he knew only as Lomond.

CHAPTER II.

TWO "LOW-DOWN JASPERS."

FROM far down the road in the direction of the little town of Festival there suddenly came two shots followed by the rhythmical pounding of horses' hoofs that grew steadily louder.

Solitaire Stevens reined his mount as he rode along toward the town. He sat motionless, a tall lean man on a wiry little gray, listening intently as he gazed ahead of him through the shadowy darkness which lingered in spite of the moon.

Cold blue eyes set in a strong, tanned face stared from beneath the brim of a worn black Stetson, while his thin, whimsical lips were puckered in that soft musical sound that had brought him his name of "the whistling waddy."

His right hand rested lightly upon the butt of one of the two heavy Colts which hung in well-worn open holsters on either hip and which were tied low by a long leather thong about each leg.

Again came the sound of a shot from somewhere amid the darkness of the winding road ahead.

Solitaire frowned as he heard it, for he realized it meant trouble for some one, but he continued to whistle softly and musically. As the approaching hoofs drew nearer Stevens rode his wiry little gray into the shadows of a clump of trees. Again there was the roar of a gun.

The whistling waddy suddenly grew silent as he gazed out at the moonlit road. He could see only a short distance ahead of him, for about a hundred yards away the road curved sharply and disappeared behind a row of trees. Above these the distant lights of Festival left a faint glow in the sky.

Abruptly a horse and rider shot out

from the trees and moved rapidly toward the place where Solitaire sat in the shadows beside the road. As the rider drew closer Stevens gave a start.

It was a girl who rode so hastily, lashing her already galloping mount to even greater speed. She wore no hat, and short blond bobbed hair fluttered about her white, frightened face as she gazed anxiously behind her from time to time.

She had scarcely passed before Solitaire heard other riders pounding after her. There was a shout, followed by the growl of a heavy revolver, and the hidden puncher heard a bullet whine by the girl.

As he did so a grim rage stole over the whistling waddy; he had been a lonely wanderer all his life, and women had never interested him, but he did possess a great deal of reverence and respect for them. That a man would shoot at a girl went against the grain; it was not the sort of thing that his creed would permit him to let happen without his going into action.

As two hard-faced men galloped up Solitaire entered into the fray. His gun roared and a bullet hummed dangerously near the head of the man who rode a little in the lead. Startled, both men halted their horses abruptly and looked about them nervously.

"Hands up!" barked a hidden voice.

The two men gazed in the direction of the sound, but they could only make out the dim form of a horseman in the shadow of the trees beside the road. As they hesitated Solitaire rode out onto the road, a heavy Colt in either hand, blue handkerchief tied about the lower part of his face so that only his eyes were visible beneath his hat.

"Yuh heard me!" he said, his voice hard, and ominous. "Up, I said, or there's gonna be a couple of dead jaspers, pronto!"

"Who th' devil are yuh?" growled one of the men, an evil-faced brute with a jagged scar running across his left cheek. "What's this, a holdup?"

"Never mind what it is!" said Solitaire. "Put them hands up an' keep 'em there! I ain't tellin' yuh again!"

Slowly the two men raised their hands high above their heads. They were very reluctant about it, but there was something in the crisp tones of this masked man which warned them it was best to play safe.

"That's better," remarked Stevens as he observed their actions, and then a cold rage again swept over him. "Yuh two birds oughta be ashamed!" he said. "It must take a couple of damn brave men tuh shoot at a girl. What's the idea?"

"That's our business!" remarked the second man, a dark, slender individual with a black mustache which could not hide the cruelness of his mouth.

"Yea?" Solitaire laughed softly, dangerously, beneath his mask. "Me, I'm just hell on minding other folks' business!"

As he talked, the whistling waddy heard the steady pounding of the girl's horse grow fainter. This was what he was working for now; the longer he delayed the two men the better chance the girl would have to get away.

"You acts like it," said the scar-faced man sullenly.

"Sure," Solitaire remarked. "It's a bad habit I got of buttin' in an' playin' a hand when it kinda looks like th' cards was stacked against somebody!"

"So it seems!" said the dark man. "Maybe if I was tuh tell yuh that yuh was interferin' with th' law yuh wouldn't be so damn smart!"

That these two men might possibly be officers of the law had not even entered Solitaire's head; it would have made little difference in his actions if it had occurred to him. He had all the more contempt for the men if this was the case, for surely justice could be carried through without two strong, able-bodied men shooting at a woman. He was not inclined to believe the dark man's statement anyway.

"Oh, I donno." There came what

sounded like a chuckle from beneath the mask. "I kinda been weaned; I don't believe all I hears, nor half I sees!" His voice grew hard at a slight motion from the scar-faced man. "Keep 'em up, I said!"

"Sorta nervous, ain't yuh?" the scar-faced man asked.

"Uh-huh," answered Solitaire, still conscious of the fact that the more he talked the farther away the girl would be able to get. "I'm right funny that-away, mostly in my trigger fingers. I ain't got much self-control. 'Specially when I run up against a couple of dirt yeller dawgs that 'd shoot at a woman an' then say they was th' Law!"

"Meaning?" asked the dark man.

"That I'd just as leave shoot a couple of polecats when I sees 'em as not!"

"Kinda gettin' right personal, ain't yuh? Talkin' right big because yuh got the drop on us," remarked Scar-face. "If yuh was tuh look right close at Hagen's vest yuh might be able tuh see that badge he's wearin'!"

"Oh, yea!" Stevens stared at the man called Hagen. "Pretty, ain't it? An' it's got 'Sheriff' printed on it, just as plain." He laughed. "Now, why didn't I see that before? Reckon my eyesight's gettin' bad!"

For the first time the whistling waddy was convinced that these two were really officers of the law, and he was rather glad that a sudden hunch had caused him to mask his face before appearing upon the road. He felt that these men and the frightened blond girl whom they had been chasing so relentlessly had some connection with the murdered man that he had left in the ranch house but an hour ago.

"I told yuh that yuh was interferin' with the law," remarked Hagen.

Solitaire did not answer. He was listening for the sound of the girl's horse. He could no longer hear it, and it relieved him greatly. Abruptly he put spurs to his own mount. The little gray leaped forward with startling suddenness.

Before the two men more than half realized what had happened, horse and rider went tearing along the road toward the distant town of Festival, and as they did so the sound of a faint, musically whistled tune came drifting back to Hagen's and his deputy's ears.

There was a sound of a shot, and a bullet whistled by Stevens's cheek. He ducked and looked back as he reached the first curve in the winding road. To his surprise the two men were not following him. They were galloping swiftly in the direction that the girl had gone.

When he had turned the curve and was out of sight, Solitaire slowed his gray down to a walk. The wandering puncher laughed as he removed the handkerchief from his face.

"Reckon she's done had time tuh get right far away," he remarked softly. "Looks like I got myself intuh somethin' tuh-night." He nodded.

"First I goes snoopin' round a ranch where I ain't got no more business bein' than a rabbit. An' what does I find? A jasper that 'd been choked tuh death an' a lot of funny things goin' on.

"Next I gets all het up when I sees a couple of low-down jaspers shootin' at a girl, an' goes buckin' th' law." Stevens shook his head in mock sadness as he rode on. "An' me such a peaceful hombre! It's sure tough th' way me an' trouble always rides double!"

Solitaire grinned, and then from his lips there issued the thrilling, birdlike notes of a strange little tune, and there was an ominous warning in that plaintively whistled air.

CHAPTER III.

WHO GETS THE PROFIT?

A FEW minutes later Solitaire Stevens rode slowly and quietly into the little town of Festival. He glanced casually about him as he jogged along the dust-covered street.

On both sides of him were the rough wooden buildings of the place: Stores with their tall, false fronts containing bright, crudely painted signs proclaiming the wares of the place beneath, an occasional dwelling nestled in among them, all grouped along the one and only street of which the little cow town boasted.

At the hitching rail of the Full-House Saloon the puncher dismounted a bit stiffly, for he had ridden nearly fifty miles that day. Far behind him along the trail he had left the ranch on which he had been working as a top hand for awhile; it was not his way to linger in one place for any length of time.

It was midsummer now and the eternal wanderlust that hung over the whistling waddy and made him one of the greatest riddles to those who knew him had again come upon him. Always he had followed the urge that sent him onward, ever seeking new country to explore. He preferred to go riding about the range land whistling and alone.

His cognomen of the Whistling Waddy was vaguely familiar to many who had never even seen him. The humors of a man's reputation occasionally traveled far in those days, and Solitaire Stevens was known as a grim figure who possessed two-gun magic in the ruthless, lightninglike swiftness with which he could draw the heavy Colts strapped low on his legs.

He was said to be a grim killer when aroused, but there were none who dared to say that he had ever shot a man in any but a fair fight.

Now he tied his mount to the hitching rail at the end of a long string of cow ponies, and walked across the rough wooden planking which led to the swinging doors of the bar of the Full-House. Solitaire had gathered a double thirst; he craved a drink and information.

He glanced quietly around him as he entered. It was still rather early in the evening, and the big barren room with its many tables and its ornate mirrored bar had not as yet thrown off the lassitude of the sweltering August day.

At a table in one corner four men were deeply engrossed in a game of cards, at another a faded dance hall girl in a short spangled dress chatted listlessly with a gray-bearded prospector from the desert.

A stout, moon-faced man dressed in a wrinkled blue suit and with a straw hat thrust far back on his moist forehead stood beside the bar chatting with the barkeeper, a sad-faced individual whose countenance resembled that of an Irish terrier.

"But that ain't half as good as what the old lady says to the station agent," said the fat man with a laugh as Stevens strolled up to the bar. He turned and gazed at the puncher. "Good evenin', stranger."

"Reckon it is," remarked Solitaire as he ordered his drink. "I seen two or three better ones down around th' Panhandle way, but tuh-night ain't nothin' tuh kick about."

"That's a good one!" the fat man laughed. "Glad to meet you." He held out a flabby hand. "Mintz is the name, Herman Mintz."

"Howdy, mine's Stevens."

The fat man frowned as Solitaire squeezed his hand in a viselike grip, and the latter smiled.

"Yuh live around here?" he asked.

"I should live in a place like this!" Gingerly Mintz flexed his fingers as the puncher released them. "No, I'm a traveling man. I gotta swell line, fancy notions for the ladies—imported novelties." His tone became eager. "Maybe you'd like to see some of them, huh? Might get a little gift for the missus, yes?"

"No," said Solitaire slowly. "I ain't married."

That the fat salesman might even suspect him of such a thing as being a married man amused the whistling waddy greatly. Women had always

played such a minor part in his life that the thought itself was surprising.

As a matter of fact, what Solitaire Stevens had been seeking all his restless life was romance, and women had never meant anything to him merely because he had not met the right one.

"You ain't married!" exclaimed Mintz. "Such a pity."

"Maybe." Stevens's tone was doubtful; he looked about him. "Guess yuh don't find Festival very excitin', does yuh?"

"Exciting!" Mintz shook his head. "Listen, I'm telling, one more week in this place and it's gray hair I'm getting! Every little while somebody gets feeling foolish, and, bang goes a gun! It's heart failure I've got if I stay here long—such a place!"

"Sounds kinda interestin'," remarked Solitaire thoughtfully. "Yuh talk like this town was livin' up to its name. Is that right?"

Mintz looked about him nervously before he answered, and then he lowered his voice.

"You don't belong around here, do you?" he asked. "Where'd you come from, Mr. Stevens?"

For an instant the two-gun man's eyes narrowed, and he stared intently at the other, his gaze cold and hard. As he caught the look Herman Mintz paled and his hands shook nervously, for he thought that he saw the ominous threat of death in the expression of the whistling waddy, and he was quite right.

"I didn't mean to get personal," he said hastily, his voice trembling in spite of his effort to steady it. "I got a good reason for asking."

"Yes?" Solitaire's voice was low, but there was something in its tone that did not make the traveling salesman feel the slightest bit safer. "Maybe yuh better trot out yuhr reason."

"Sure, sure!" Mintz glanced about him, and observed that there was no one within earshot. The barkeeper had gone to the other end of the bar and was polishing it with a rag. "Listen, Mr. Stevens, I ain't been here in town but a few days, but already I learns that there's something wrong here. The sheriff, the storekeepers, everybody is being bossed by a feller that they calls the Chief."

"Th' Chief, eh?" remarked Stevens. "Who is he? What's he look like?"

"That's just it; from what I hear they ain't no one that really knows who the Chief is—he works under coverlike and gives his orders through a feller called Blocky MacGill, who owns the Lazy X ranch."

"How'd yuh learn all this?" demanded Solitaire, gazing at Mintz intently.

"Just listenin' when no one thought I was around," said the fat man. "I'm a stranger here, and being a stranger in Festival ain't such a healthy business, particularly for a feller like you what carries guns and everything—that's why I'm telling you all this now."

"Thanks," said Stevens, and then he smiled. "Reckon I sized yuh up wrong, Mintz, I'm sure right much obliged for what yuh've told me."

"You're welcome." Mintz sighed with obvious relief, and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "Such a country! You say it's a nice day, and another feller says it ain't, and, bing, you're dead. The feller what first invented them words, 'Watch your step,' must have lived around here."

The fat man reached in his pocket and produced a small object which he handed to Solitaire. "Look! Here's a little present for you. One of my best sellers—genuine, unbreakable silk thread."

"Thread?" Stevens glanced down at the spool of dark thread that Mintz had given him. "Now what yuh figure I'm gonna do with that?"

"Who knows—it might come in handy. You never can tell, you might lose a button or something." The salesman smiled and shook his big head as Solitaire started to hand the spool of

thread back. "No, you keep it; it's a gift."

"All right." The whistling waddy grinned as he thrust the thread in his pocket. "Thanks—how about a little drink?"

"I shouldn't say no," remarked Mintz.

"Sure not," said Stevens as they ordered; then as the barkeeper moved away again he spoke in a low tone. "Say, did yuh ever hear of a jasper named Major Marsh around here?"

"Yes," the salesman nodded. "He owns the Circle T ranch." He, too, lowered his voice. "And they say he's rich—that he has fifty thousand dollars in gold hidden somewhere on the place!"

"Fifty thousand hidden on th' ranch," said Solitaire softly, beginning to see a good reason for an unscrupulous person to commit murder. "I see; know anything about a tall, strange looking hombre named Lomond?"

"Lomond!" exclaimed Mintz, a startled expression passing over his face. "Such a man! Like a ghost, he is—with his white face and his staring eyes. They say that Guido Lomond is a lawyer, but I don't know—I don't know!"

"Yuh think he might be somethin' else?" asked Stevens.

Mintz started to speak, then his expression changed. His mouth remained wide open as he stood staring nervously at the door.

Solitaire glanced in that direction. A big, heavy-set man stood in the doorway glaring about the room, a sullen scowl upon his face as he chewed viciously upon an unlighted cigar.

As he caught sight of Stevens he stared at the whistling waddy intently. For an instant he eyed him up and down insultingly, then uttered a short laugh and moved back through the door and disappeared.

As he did so the salesman breathed a sigh of relief. Solitaire turned to him, his eyes hard.

"Who was that?" he asked softly.

"Him?" The fat man glanced about him anxiously and lowered his voice. "That's Blocky MacGill, the feller I was telling you about. He's boss of this town, because the Chief is back of him, and such a boss! He runs the sheriff, and the law feller accused that poor little girl of murder!"

"What?" Solitaire was startled. "The sheriff accused a girl of murder?"

"Sure." Mintz nodded. "She got away all right, but MacGill he sent the sheriff and one of his deputies after her." The drummer shook his head. "Such a shame it is, and she such a pretty girl. But everybody around here does what MacGill says because they're afraid of him and the Chief."

"I'll see yuh later," said Solitaire suddenly. "I got business with this Blocky MacGill!"

He turned away, whistling softly, and there was a warning of danger in the sound. Mintz shook his head slowly as he watched him go.

"Me—I wouldn't want business like that!" remarked the fat salesman to himself. "The profit is all with the undertaker!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN SHADOWS FLIT.

BLOCKY MacGILL was in an evil humor. At the moment he bore a sullen grouch against the whole world, and he was not making the slightest effort to keep the fact a secret.

His was not an amicable disposition at its best, and in his present mood he was far from a genial companion, for he possessed the type of temper which causes its owner to rave and roar on and on until his anger finally dies away overcome by its own exertion.

Jake Willis, who was MacGill's favorite henchman, realized this as he sat patiently listening to the big man

rave. When MacGill started to talk it was best to let him finish without attempting to stop the flow of words, which consisted mostly of a torrent of profanity.

Now the two men sat in the sheriff's office, which was located in a rough wooden shack a few doors down the street from the Full-House Saloon.

Behind the shack was a much more substantially constructed building that contained no windows, and a heavy door that was barred from the outside. This was Festival's jail, but as the ruthless element who ruled the town believed that dead men were less trouble than prisoners, it was seldom occupied.

MacGill finally ceased his wild ranting, and for a moment the two men sat in silence, their faces clearly outlined beneath the mellow glow of a large oil lantern that hung suspended above their heads by a wire attached to the rafters of the shack's roof.

Willis, a thin, hawk faced man with a twisted lip and little, close set eyes that were so dark they appeared black, sat upon an up-turned wooden box busily engaged in rolling a cigarette.

MacGill was sprawled comfortably in a chair back of the rough wooden table which the sheriff used for a desk. His heavy-booted legs rested upon the table top regardless of a collection of official-looking papers beneath them.

When the big man had been silent for a few seconds now, chewing upon the unlighted cigar which was thrust into one corner of his mouth, he ran the fingers of his left hand through his heavy mop of gray hair. That was a sign to those who knew him that Blocky MacGill had something on his mind.

"Funny Hagen an' th' deputy ain't got back yet," he remarked. "They should 'a' been here long ago."

"It sure is," agreed Willis slowly. He placed his newly-made cigarette in his mouth and lit it, then shook his head. "Still that Shaw girl has a right considerable hoss an' she's a ridin' fool."

"Yea, I know she is," grunted MacGill. He frowned angrily. "A fine sheriff Hagen turned out tuh be—letting her get away like that! You wait; he better watch his step or I'll be puttin' some one else in office when th' election comes around."

You'll be puttin' some one else in office." Willis grinned sardonically. "I reckon the Chief would sure love tuh hear yuh say that!"

"Never mind about him," said MacGill. "I'm runnin' this town and everything around here, ain't I?"

"Sure, but yuh takes yuhr orders from th' Chief and pass 'em on, don't yuh—just th' same as I does with the orders I gets from you for the rest of the outfit. But I been hearin' things lately and we got tuh watch out."

"Watch out?" MacGill looked at the other man intently. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said; some of the folks around here are kinda champin' at th' bit. Some of these hombres are a lot like horses; they go along peaceful like for a long time, and then something happens that they don't like and they bust out bucking regardless."

"Think I don't know that?" MacGill laughed. "Listen, Jake, the Chief made me th' boss around here, and I'm gonna stay boss."

"Sure. But they seems tuh think yuh been runnin' things a bit too high-handed lately." Willis frowned. "I don't know 'bout this business with th' Shaw girl being such a good play. I ain't so sure th' Chief is gonna like the idea when he gets back."

"That's my lookout, ain't it?" demanded MacGill angrily. "When I want yuh tuh play my hand I'll tell yuh; get me? As for Helen Shaw, she killed Denver Hopkins, didn't she?"

"Of course she did," said Willis soothingly; then he sat up and glanced toward the open window at the side

of the office, a window which faced a dark little alleyway between the shack and the square bulk of a hardware store on the left. "What was that?"

"What was what?" MacGill glanced at the window. "Did yuh hear somethin'?"

For an instant Willis did not answer; he remained gazing silently at the window, but he did not move from the box. Finally he shook his head.

"I guess it was nothin'. I thought I seen a shadow passin', that was all."

"Huh." MacGill laughed. "Gettin' kinda jumpy, ain't yuh?" His tone changed. "Listen, Jake, when Helen Shaw finished Hopkins she played right into my hands." He leered. "She's a right pretty girl, and th' Cross Bar J is one of the best ranches round in this part of th' country. It's better than mine, an' that's sayin' somethin'."

"It sure is; the Lazy X is hard tuh beat." Willis looked intently at MacGill. "Kinda tough, old man Shaw had tuh get killed, just when things was goin' good on th' Cross Bar J. Funny thing about that; I never get the story straight. The old man's hoss throwed him, didn't it?"

"Yes." MacGill stared at the table in front of him. "Musta kicked him, too. One of his punchers found him with his head caved in. Let's see; that's been over a year ago now, ain't it?"

"Just about. Queer the way old Major Marsh, over on the Circle T, keeps on insisting now and then that his friend Henry Shaw was murdered, ain't it?"

"Uh-huh," said MacGill, but he did not lift his eyes. "Since her father died Helen's been runnin' the Cross Bar J, yuh know, Jake."

"Sure. But hell, that ain't nothin' hard tuh do, not with Major Marsh advising her now and then; and Buck Larkins is a right good foreman, even if I don't like him worth a damn."

"Never mind about Larkins and the major. They ain't gonna bother me none. It's Helen Shaw I want. I been wanting her and the ranch for some time. I even asked her tuh marry me." MacGill frowned. "But she sure treats me like I was dirt. She wouldn't if she was wise."

"I'll say not." Willis grinned. "What happened between her and Denver? All I know is that she plugged him."

"Oh, that! Well, early this morning Hopkins meets th' girl out riding alone on th' range." MacGill laughed. "I hear she's been havin' a little trouble with her outfit. Anyway Denver never did have much sense, an' he starts tuh get rough.

"The two of them struggles, and th' girl grabs Denver's gun. He tries tuh take it away from her, an' while they're fightin' th' gun goes off an' kills Hopkins. I ain't weepin' none about that—Denver never was worth a hoot anyway."

"Still it put th' girl in bad."

"Sure, that's just it." MacGill smiled evilly. "An' that's where I come in! Helen Shaw goes back tuh the ranch, and thinks th' whole thing over durin' the day. Maybe she asks Major Marsh what she should do. I don't know about that.

"Anyway, this evenin' she rides intuh town an' tells Sheriff Hagen what's happened. I guess she figured he'd consider it self-defense or somethin' like that and let it go."

"But he didn't, did he?"

"Naw. Hagen don't see it that way. He tells her she's under arrest for murder. Then, as yuh know, Helen sees th' cards are all against her. She pulls a gun and covers Hagen, then gets on her hoss and beats it. She ain't gone far when the sheriff and Tom Blake, the deputy, starts after her. An' that's that."

"Maybe." Willis's tone was doubtful. "I still think th' Chief ain't goin' to like th' play. Besides, I don't see how yuh come in on it yet?"

"If yuh had my brains yuh would," said MacGill. "I seen the whole thing happen this morning out on the range—I was just gonna tell Denver where to go when Helen shoots him, and then I gets a bright idea and ducks out of sight.

"Hagen has his orders from me, see. He's tuh keep her in jail for awhile. When Helen finds I can get her free from a charge of murder she's gonna sing a diffrent tune th' next time she sees Blocky MacGill."

"Yes, but how about Major Marsh and Buck Larkins?" demanded Willis. "They ain't gonna let yuh get away with it."

"No? Well, don't be so sure about that. The major is a fool. He's got fifty thousand dollars in gold hidden somewhere on the Circle T, and that hunchback feller, and the big mute that he's got working for him, are gonna murder him some night for the money, or I don't know a hoss from a pack-rabbit."

The big man laughed. "As for Larkins, I ain't no more worried about him than I am about the rest of the Cross Bar J punchers, and you know they ain't botherin' us none."

Willis nodded silently. From outside the open window there suddenly came the soft musical notes of a whistled tune. With a swift motion the hawk faced man leaped to the opening and stared out into the night. He caught sight of a vague shadow flitting around the corner of the building, that was all. The whistling had ceased.

CHAPTER V.

HELEN HUNTS HELP.

A PALE moon still brooded over the low, rambling structure that was the ranch house of the Circle T. All about the place the shadows lingered in spite of the moonbeams.

The front door of the house was tightly closed now, but a light burned dimly through a crack in a drawn shade at the window of the big room where Solitaire Stevens had found the body of Major Marsh. The window was still halfway open, but as there was no wind the shade did not move.

Within the room there were now three strange, sinister figures that fitted all too well with the ominous silence of the place, their faces clearly outlined in the glow of the oil lamp upon the table.

The first of these was a tall, slender man dressed in a long frock coat that was green with age, while his dark trousers were thrust into the tops of heavy boots upon which were fastened ornate Mexican spurs.

His hat was off now, revealing a thick mass of curly black hair which contrasted strangely with the death-like whiteness of his thin face. His eyes were dark, and so intense was their gaze that they seemed almost like live, burning coals sunk deep into the flesh above his high cheekbones.

His lips, beneath the straight nose, were thin and cruel; but it was his hands that one remembered, the long, slender fingers were like white claws, and they moved restlessly whenever the man spoke. This was Guido Lomond, attorney-at-law.

The second figure was that of a sullen-faced, white-haired hunchback. His arms were extremely muscular, and appeared too long for his grotesque, misshapen body. When he moved, his great head seemed buried in his chest, and his arms swung in front of him like those of a great ape.

He wore a heavy gray-flannel shirt, and there was a long knife in a sheath fastened to the heavy belt about his waist. A pair of worn overalls were thrust into his boots. And now there was an intent look in the great catlike eyes that were half hidden beneath dark, bushy brows.

The third man was a big, dark-faced, stolid-looking individual, who was so tall and powerfully built that

he made Guido Lomond seem far shorter and more fragile than he really was. The big man's eyes were wide and staring, and as his head was totally bald they made his expression like that of an ill-tempered baby.

"And you say you saw him through the window," remarked Lomond, as though continuing a conversation as he gazed at the hunchback. "What did he look like, Juan?"

"He was a tall man," the hunchback answered, his voice almost a whisper. "A stranger, a cowboy, I believe. He wore two guns, and he was ready to use them." Juan smiled faintly. "He was startled when he saw the major."

"The major was dead then?" asked Lomond. "You are sure?"

"Quite." There was something ironical in the hunchback's half whispered tones. "Lagrew knows I speak the truth." He looked at the big man.

The latter, his eyes upon the hunchback's lips, mumbled as though trying to speak and then nodded his head.

"I see," said Lomond slowly, and his white face did not change expression in the slightest degree. "Perhaps this stranger's unexpected visit is fortunate." His dark eyes gleamed. "It might be that he had reason to quarrel with the major. The old gentleman had rather a hasty temper—sometimes such altercations lead to murder, isn't that true, Juan?"

"Yes." The hunchback nodded and uttered a strange sound that might have been a laugh. "Such things do happen."

"You would remember this man if you saw him again, Juan?"

"Juan never forgets a face, Mr. Lomond. And should this man be found again, what then?"

"Major Marsh had been cruelly murdered. Naturally Sheriff Hagen will be very anxious to arrest the man who committed the crime. You are the major's trusted servant. It might be that you heard the major and this man quarrel—their voices were loud.

"You became curious and peered in through the window. You saw this two-gun man choke the major to death with his bare hands, but before you could aid your master the stranger disappeared." Lomond stared intently at the hunchback. "Is that not so, Juan?"

"It is so." Juan nodded his big head. "And so it is I tell the sheriff when we find this man."

"I am glad you are so observing." The lawyer glanced at the still figure which lay beside the desk as Solitaire Stevens had found it, but a heavy blanket was spread over it now.

"I—" The hunchback paused abruptly, and stood listening as there came the clatter of horse's hoofs outside the house. The sound drew nearer, and then there came a pounding on the front door.

"Perhaps our friend has decided to return," said Lomond in a whisper. "Open the door, Juan." The white-faced man's restless hands disappeared suddenly in the pockets of his long coat. And he stepped to one side of the room out of sight of any one who might be at the door.

The hunchback moved toward the door, drew it open, and found himself staring into the worried countenance of a pretty, blond girl.

"I must see Major Marsh at once," she said, moving into the house before the hunchback could speak. "Tell him that Helen Shaw is here, please, Juan; it is vitally important."

She moved forward into the room, and then gave a gasp of startled surprise as Guido Lomond stepped forward. The lawyer bowed.

"I am sorry, Miss Shaw," he said softly, "but I am afraid that nothing is vitally interesting to the major any longer."

The girl stared at him, terror in her eyes. She looked like a young and beautiful boy as she stood there, her close-cropped golden hair curling about her face, her slender figure clad in a

white linen riding suit, a crimson scarf knotted loosely about her throat, her tiny feet incased in shining black leather boots.

Around her waist she wore a cartridge belt, and a thirty-eight rested in a carved leather holster which hung on her right hip.

"What—what do you mean?" she stammered, and then her eyes rested upon the still form beneath the blanket on the floor. "Oh—Major Marsh—is—is not dead?"

"Unfortunately," said Lomond softly, suavely, "he is. He was murdered, Miss Shaw. Brutally strangled to death by a stranger. Juan saw it all through the window—but before he could come to the major's aid — the deed was done — and the stranger escaped."

"Oh," the girl groaned. "Major Marsh—dead! He was my only friend —I came because I was so sure he would help me—oh, dear God, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

Her voice broke and she began to sob.

"Please, Miss Shaw"—Lomond's tone was soothing—"you must try not to let your grief master you. I, too, am sorry that the major is dead."

"Sorry—you!" With an effort the girl gained control of herself. "Do you think I'm a fool, Mr. Lomond? I know that the major and you have always been bitter enemies." Her blue eyes flashed. "I—I believe you killed him yourself!"

"Jumping at conclusions is always dangerous," said Guido Lomond; and there was an ominous note in his tone. "I did not kill Major Marsh—and to be accused of the crime is exceedingly distasteful to me. I judge you are in serious trouble, and I want to aid you; but if you take this attitude I certainly cannot do so."

"I must go."

Helen Shaw turned toward the front door.

As she did so, the hunchback moved so that he blocked her way, and stood there, a faint smile upon his heavy face.

"Perhaps Mr. Lomond does not wish you to leave yet," he said.

"Get out of my way, please," said the girl angrily. "I shall leave at once."

"No, you won't!" said Lomond, moving toward her and grabbing her roughly by the arm. "You are going to remain here until I learn why you were so anxious to see the major."

"Let me go!" Helen's voice was shrill, excited. "I'll never tell you why I'm here."

There was a sudden flapping sound as the drawn shade at the open window rolled up abruptly. Those in the room gazed in that direction, to see a man staring into the room.

Upon his head he wore a worn black Stetson, and the lower part of his face was concealed by a blue handkerchief. In either hand he held a heavy Colt, with which he was covering the three men.

"I figures when a lady says she wants to leave, it's best tuh let her go," he said, his voice low, drawling. "One move from any of yuh three jaspers an' I'm gonna shoot tuh kill."

Lomond started to speak, but something in the hard gleam of the blue eyes beneath the broad brim of the big hat told him it was better to remain silent.

"Put them hands up!" said the masked man. "And be damn quick about it—or I start shootin'!"

Slowly Lomond raised his white hands above his head. The deaf-mute looked at the lawyer, saw his action, and did likewise. The hunchback hesitated but an instant, and then he too reached his arms high in the air.

"That's better," remarked the man at the window. "Listen, Miss Shaw, yuh beat it—and beat it quick! I'll tend tuh this outfit."

For an instant the girl stood there as though she did not know just what to do, and then she turned and ran out

of the house, slamming the front door after her. As she mounted her horse she glanced along the side of the house and saw a tall figure standing outside of the window of the room which she had just left so hurriedly.

When she rode away there came faintly to her ears the sound of some one whistling loudly, musically. She uttered a sob that was half of relief as she galloped madly onward through the night.

CHAPTER VI.

CIRCLING FESTIVAL.

EARLY the next morning Solitaire Stevens rode thoughtfully in the direction of the Cross Bar J Ranch. He felt that the previous night had been one of the most eventful that he had ever spent.

It had been a sudden hunch upon his part which had caused him to ride back to the Circle T after he had overheard the conversation between Blocky MacGill and Jake Willis as he listened outside the sheriff's office.

Knowing from what the two men had said that Major Marsh had been a friend of Helen Shaw's, the whistling waddy had become certain that the dead man was the first person that the girl would seek once she had outdistanced the sheriff.

At the same time Solitaire had remembered the croaking whisper, the crawling figure, and the white-faced man that he had seen at the Circle T, and had begun to fear for the girl's safety if she visited the place.

Now he considered that his return had been fortunate in more ways than one. He had arrived at the ranch house quite some time before the girl had appeared, and he judged that she had come by a roundabout way in order to try and put Hagen and Blake off the track.

At any rate, Stevens had overheard most of the conversation which had taken place within the room before the girl had appeared. He knew that Lomond's suave statements that the two-gun stranger must have murdered the major, and the suggestion that the hunchback had seen him do it was part of a plan to put him in jeopardy.

He had only remained at the window covering Lomond, the hunchback, and Lagrew until he was sure that the girl had made her escape, and then he too had made a dash for it.

He had reached the little gray, which he had once again hidden in a clump of trees some distance from the ranch house, without mishap, and had finally camped for the night in the shadowy shelter of a ravine some distance back along the trail which led to Festival.

Now he was mentally going over the details of the whole adventure. In thinking the matter over he was very glad now that none of those with whom he had interfered had seen his face, save Blocky MacGill, and he doubted that the latter would connect the quiet puncher whom he had seen at the bar of the Full-House with the man who had held up the two officers of the law, even though Hagen and Blake had probably told the big man what had occurred by now.

What Solitaire wanted to know now was just what connection had Lomond with Blocky MacGill and the latter's henchmen? He was halfway inclined to believe that Lomond might be the illusive Chief who ruled the district, but of this he could not of course be sure.

Jake Willis had stated that the Chief was away; if such was the case, then Lomond was not the man. However, there was something about the lawyer that made the whistling waddy realize that the man was the only one that he had seen or heard about so far that appeared to possess the brains required to cast his hidden and sinister rule over the surrounding country, as the Chief was said to do.

Another thing which puzzled Solitaire was why Helen Shaw's outfit had not come to her aid. He felt sure that they had learned what had occurred by this time, for the news of the girl's having resisted arrest when accused of murder must have been known by many others beside Mintz and MacGill and Willis.

"Fine bunch her outfit must be," remarked Solitaire aloud as he rode along. "Lettin' a girl play th' hand alone!" He shook his head. "I don't get it. From what Willis said last night, her foreman, Buck Larkins, is a right considerable jasper."

He found himself remembering the picture the girl had presented as she had stood there in the big room in the Circle T the night before.

"Helen Shaw, eh? That's a right pretty name; it sure is!" Stevens grinned; the idea of a lone wanderer like himself finding a girl's name even interesting amused him. "I acts like I don't recollect I ever done before. Me gettin' interested in a girl."

He laughed aloud in the bright, warm sunshine of the day, and had any one who knew the grim, taciturn man, known as the whistling waddy, seen him then, they would have realized with surprise that he was young, not more than thirty at the most. "Ain't that something! I better go easy, or I'll be buyin' up all them fancy novelties for ladies that feller Mintz is sellin'."

He drew the spool of thread out of his pocket. Carefully he examined the fat salesman's gift. Finally he nodded.

"Maybe she'd like that," he remarked, as he put it carefully away again. "Women is right fond of them sewing things. Reckon I'll give it tuh her if I ever sees her again."

Solitaire had ridden around the town of Festival, for he had paused long enough before leaving for the Circle T the night before to receive explicit directions from Mintz regarding the location of Helen Shaw's ranch.

Now he found that the surrounding country was gradually changing. It began to grow more and more hilly, and finally he found himself riding through a rocky defile. He was following a faint trail that twisted and turned like the path of a snake as it wound around large, crude-shaped bowlders that were taller than both man and horse together.

Stevens observed his surroundings closely, for he felt it might be wise to have a knowledge of the vicinity firmly fixed in his mind. When one was playing against uncertain odds such information sometimes came in handy.

Finally he rode out of the rocky section and saw ahead of him the well kept low buildings of the Cross Bar J Ranch. The first thing that he noticed was a lack of animation about the place. Far in the distance he caught sight of a number of cattle, while in the wooden-fenced corral half a dozen cow ponies grazed listlessly, but there was no sign of human inhabitant.

At the ranch house, a low adobe building, Stevens reined his horse and dismounted. He walked to the open front door and knocked, but received no answer.

"Sorta looks like there's nobody home," murmured Solitaire, after he had knocked loudly and repeatedly. "Reckon it won't do any harm tuh go in and take a little look around."

Fitting his actions to his words, the whistling waddy entered. Slowly he went through the rooms on the single floor of the house. He found them exceptionally well furnished, but vacant of anything human.

One of the doors which he opened revealed a bedroom that, from the feminine touches about it, mutely bespoke the usual presence of the girl. This was the case with the whole house —there were feminine indications all about it: flowers in a vase, many little

trifles that a woman's hand had made more attractive by placing there.

Stevens's inspection finally ended with the kitchen. Here he found there was a large supply of food, and the dishes which still remained upon a long table in the center of the room were evidence of a heavy meal for at least six people.

"Huh! Right funny there ain't no one around." The two-gun man shook his head as he looked about him. "Maybe I better look down in the bunk house. Fine bunch of jaspers this here outfit must be! They oughta be raisin' hell plenty with the Chief and MacGill and that there bunch of low-down pups what represents th' law round here."

He left the house and walked slowly down to the bunk house, a small adobe building about a hundred feet away. As he reached the door, which stood open, as had that of the ranch house, a sharp voice from within growled suddenly:

"Put 'em up, stranger!"

Solitaire raised his hands high above his head as he moved slowly into the room. He stood staring at a husky light-haired man who sat on the edge of a bunk covering him with a revolver. As he inspected the other, Stevens decided that he liked the looks of the blond man.

"Yuh got me wrong," he remarked with a faint smile. "The dove of peace is a roarin' devil compared tuh me. There ain't no reason for yuh tuh draw down on me. I'm right friendly like tuh the Cross Bar J outfit, and I reckon yuh must be one of them."

"Sure, yuh're just dyin' tuh kiss us all!" The blond man's tone grew hard. "Listen, feller, if yuh think I'm gonna let MacGill put somethin' over on me by sendin' a stranger around here, yuh got another guess comin', that's all. An' that goes for that slimy undercover bird th' Chief, too."

"I still says yuh got me wrong," said Solitaire quietly. "I ain't runnin' with MacGill none, nor th' Chief either. Tuh my mind th' whole pack of 'em could crawl under a snake they are so low, an' th' rattler wouldn't even know it."

"That sounds all right," said the other. "But I got yuh covered, an' yuh're gonna stay that way until I finds out right considerable about yuh!"

"Sure, I ain't blamin' yuh none." Stevens nodded. "Maybe it might ease yuhr feelin's if I was tuh give yuh my guns." His tone grew hard. "But I want tuh know who yuh are first. Yuh're one of the Cross Bar J outfit, ain't yuh?"

"I don't know as it's any of your business, but I am! I'm th' foreman; Larkins is my name. An' who th' devil are yuh?"

"Solitaire Stevens; some folks call me th' Whistling Waddy."

"Th' Whistlin' Waddy!" exclaimed Larkins, a note of respect in his tone. "I've heard of yuh."

"Uhuh," remarked Solitaire. "And yuh're Buck Larkins. Ain't any relation tuh Red Larkins, are yuh? Last I seen of Red, he was ridin' for th' Diamond Bar down in south Texas. I worked for that outfit for awhile."

"Relation, huh!" The blond man's face grew less stern. "Red's my brother, that's all. So yuh're th' Whistlin' Waddy, eh? Why didn't yuh say so? Red wrote me about yuh one time—said yuh was a shootin' two-gun fool, but that's just his little way of sayin' yuh was all there!" Larkins put his gun back in his holster and held out his hand. "Sorta looks like I got yuh wrong, Stevens. I'm apologizin'!"

"Aw, that's all right." Solitaire laughed as he took the other's hand and shook it warmly. "From what I learned last night, yuh got to be right careful."

"What yuh learned last night?" Larkins looked hard at Stevens. "What do yuh mean?"

The whistling waddy did not answer. He was staring down at the

other man's left leg; the gray trousers just above Larkins's boot appeared to be spattered with blood.

The blond man frowned as he noticed Solitaire's gaze.

"That's some of MacGill's work, damn him," he said angrily. "Somebody shot me from ambush early this morning when I was scouting around the Lazy X—that's his ranch. We been havin' a little trouble; sit down an' I" tell yuh about it."

"Never mind that now," said Stevens. "Let me take a look at that leg of yours, Larkins."

"All right," the other nodded, and Solitaire noticed that the man's face was drawn with pain. "It hurts right considerable. I ain't had time yet tuh try and fix it," he grinned. "I been watchin' yuh—I seen yuh ride up tuh th' house."

Gently Stevens removed the heavy boot and rolled up Larkins's trouser leg. He examined the wound and found a bullet had gone through the fleshy part of the calf of the leg. With some first aid materials which the foreman indicated upon a shelf above one of the many bunks in the room, Solitaire dressed and bandaged the wound.

"Thanks," said Larkins when the two-gun man had finished. "That feels a lot better now, I'm right much obliged."

"Forget it." Stevens sat on a bunk close to the other man and rolled a cigarette. "Yuh say yuh been havin' trouble?"

He knew that the Cross Bar J's owner had been having trouble, and plenty of it, but he wanted to find out just how much information Larkins possessed.

"We sure have! This outfit consists of five men, including myself." Larkins scowled. "An' durin' the past two weeks them other four fellers done disappeared one by one!"

"Disappeared!" Solitaire looked startled. "What yuh mean?"

"Just what I said. Them four punchers just vanished intuh thin air, that's all. I ain't been able tuh find a trace of one of them. An' now th' boss, Miss Shaw, is gone, too!

"I sure would like tuh know somethin' about that, although I kinda figures she has gone over tuh see Major Marsh — he's a friend of hers — he owns th' Circle T over tuh the north a ways."

"Yes, I know," said Stevens slowly. "I was there last night. But somebody killed Major Marsh—choked him tuh death."

"What?"

"Yes, and the sheriff and his deputy are huntin' Miss Shaw to arrest her for shootin' Denver Hopkins out on th' range yesterday morning."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Larkins. "What's it all about?"

"I ain't quite figured it out," said Solitaire. "But here's what happened last night."

Swiftly he related everything that had occurred from the moment he had heard the faint, creaking whisper as he stood outside the door of the Circle T until he had finally made his escape after rescuing the girl from the clutches of Guido Lomond, and the two strange creatures who worked for Major Marsh. Larkins listened intently, voicing a caustic comment now and then.

"An' so that's why I come ridin' here this mornin'," finished Stevens. "I figured that Miss Shaw might be here, and as it looked like she didn't have much of an outfit if they wasn't doin' anythin' tuh try and help her—I thought I better be around."

"How could we help her? I didn't know a thing about it, an' the rest of th' boys are missin'."

"Yea, I know that now. What yuh guess happen tuh them fellers, Larkins?"

"Yuh got me stumped. But I'm bettin' two tuh one that MacGill's crowd has somethin' tuh do with it, all right. Fact is, now that yuh told

me what he said last night, I think it's all part of th' game tuh get th' ranch away from Miss Shaw. An' I reckon this bird they calls th' Chief has a hand in it some way."

"I don't know about that. From what Willis said last night he was kinda doubtful about the Chief likin' th' play. As for this feller MacGill, I for one, ain't gonna let him get away with it."

Solitaire looked thoughtful and then he began to whistle softly, and to Larkins there was an ominous note in the sound; finally the two-gun man ceased his musical efforts and smiled. "No, I figure yuh and me will do right considerable shootin' first!"

CHAPTER VII.

NO TIME TO MAKE A PRESENT.

FOR over half an hour the two men sat in the bunk house talking over the situation. Solitaire was quite inclined to agree with Larkins's theory that MacGill and his men were the cause of the mysterious disappearance of the four Cross Bar J punchers.

Neither of them doubted for an instant that the Lazy X outfit, of which Jake Willis was the foreman, would stop at anything, even murder, to gratify the hidden commands of the man known only as the Chief.

Both Larkins and Stevens thought it advisable for the whistling waddy to remain under cover as much as possible. Solitaire had told Buck of the attempt that was to be made to place the blame for the murder of Major Marsh upon the two-gun man's shoulders should the latter be discovered and identified by the hunchback.

Such being the case, it was up to Stevens not to let any one of the Chief's band get a glimpse of him if it was humanly possible not to do so.

"I ain't figured out yet why yuh decided tuh take a hand in this game," said Buck Larkins finally. He smiled. "Not that I ain't thankin' my lucky stars that you are in on it, but how come?"

"Well, in the first place, I gets myself intuh something by going nosing around the Circle T—and there's no one ever said that Solitaire Stevens runs away from trouble.

The wandering puncher laughed. "But that ain't th' only reason. Maybe I'm what I heard a feller say he was in an election speech once, 'A righteous defender of the oppressed.' And it sure looks as though this MacGill had got this outfit oppressed plenty right now."

"Nothing would please me better than tuh put a bit of lead through his dirty heart," growled Larkins angrily. "An' I'm sure gonna do it when I meet up with him."

"Uh-huh! I haven't any what yuh could call right serious objections tuh seein' him all stretched out with pretty flowers around him and kinda tiptoein' by an' sayin', 'Don't he look natural?'" Solitaire shook his head. "But MacGill is only one man and he's takin' his orders from the Chief.

"If we get MacGill the job is only half done. There's only two of us, remember, and from what I've learned the Chief and his gang are sure a tough bunch of hombres. We can't fight out in the open, Buck; th' odds against us are too heavy. What we better do is work things as the feller says, 'sorta subtle!'"

"Subtle? What 'd yuh mean by that?" Larkins looked puzzled.

"Under cover like. Listen, MacGill don't know me. He seen me in the Full-House Saloon that was all. I was wearing a handkerchief tied around my face when I drawed down on the sheriff and the deputy out on the road. So they don't know what I look like. Same way when I held up Lomond, and Lagrew, and the hunchback, Juan. They don't know who I am either.

"Of course, Juan seen me through the window when I found the major's

body—but he can't prove I was the man at the window later. There's none of them goin' tuh see me again until I gets good and ready for 'em to—get me?"

"Sure." Larkins frowned. "I'd feel a lot better about doin' my share if it wasn't for this leg." He got slowly to his feet, tried to walk, then groaned, and sat down heavily. "Can't be done," he said grimly. "Guess I'm laid up for awhile."

"Aw, don't let that worry yuh none. Yuh'll be all right in a day or so, Buck. Lucky that bullet didn't hit a bone, You didn't even get a glimpse of the feller that done it?"

"Not a peep! Just heard a roar from a clump of trees and then it got me. Course I wasted considerable lead in that direction, but there wasn't no sign I hit anythin'."

"Never mind; we'll find out who done it in time." Solitaire glanced about the room and his gaze centered upon a short ladder which led to a trap-door above his head. "Where's that lead tuh?" he asked, indicating the ladder.

"Oh, that?" Buck followed the direction of Stevens's gaze. "No place much. The feller that built this shack sure went tuh a lot of trouble for nothin'. There's what yuh might call a little attic up there. We use it tuh store stuff away in, that's all."

"I see." The whistling waddy rose. "Say, how about me amblin' up tuh the house and rustlin' us a little food? I ain't had anything tuh eat since late yesterday afternoon; how about yuh?"

"Me neither." Larkins laughed. "The cook pulled up stakes yesterday. He was a Chink named Won Ling. When th' boys started disappearin' he got scared. Go ahead and get that grub, feller." He looked down at his injured leg. "I ain't gonna be far away."

"Right."

Stevens strolled out of the bunk house and up to the big house and entered the kitchen. Once there he began to rummage amid the foodstuffs on the shelves.

"I don't know what you're looking for!" said a musical voice from a doorway behind him. "But you're not going to get it."

Solitaire turned swiftly to find himself facing the girl he had aided the night before. Her lovely face was stern and her big blue eyes flashed as she covered him with a revolver held steadily in one slender hand.

"Morning, Miss Shaw," said Stevens politely. "I'm sure right relieved at seein' yuh. I was afraid something might 'a' happened last night."

Helen Shaw was in a highly nervous state. The events which she had been through in the past twenty-four hours had proved to be the most trying and fearful that she had ever experienced in all of her twenty years of life. Now she only realized that this man whom she had found in the kitchen of her ranch house was a stranger, and she was in a mood to distrust every one.

"Really?" Her tone was cold and hard. "Your interest in my welfare is surprising! Hands up, Mr. Man!"

Solitaire, a can of beans in one hand and a slab of bacon in the other, reached his hands high above his head, but there was a whimsical twinkle in his eyes that were as blue as the girl's.

"Maybe if yuh was tuh let me explain—" he began softly.

At any other time Helen would have heeded the friendly note his tone contained, would have remembered the man who had proved her rescuer the night before. But now she was worried, almost to the point of distraction.

"I don't want to hear a word from you!" she interrupted impatiently before Stevens could finish. "I haven't time to listen to the lies of a petty sneak thief! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, a big, able-bodied man entering a person's house and stealing food?"

"But yuh—" began Solitaire again.

"Never mind! I won't listen—you put those things down and get off this ranch at once. I've a gun and I'm not afraid to use it."

Up to that moment Solitaire had found the situation amusing. But he realized that the girl was terribly excited, and while he was willing to grant that she displayed considerable bravery in facing an armed man in the spirit that she was now doing, he was beginning to be a little annoyed.

The fact that she appeared to consider him a thief who would enter her house and steal her food was far from pleasing to his vanity. He was quite sure that she was merely bluffing in her threat to use the weapon which she now held in her hand.

"Now, listen!" he said, impatiently, moving toward her.

The gun in Helen Shaw's hand roared, and Solitaire felt a bullet whistle by his cheek. He halted abruptly and stood staring, dumfounded with amazement. Then he frowned angrily; this girl was entirely too reckless with a gun. Yet he could not help admiring her grit.

"Get out of here!" she said hysterically. "Go on, or I'll aim straighter next time!"

For a brief instant the puncher hesitated; then something in the flaming gaze of the blue eyes told him he had better obey orders. Reluctantly he put down the beans and bacon and moved toward the door. As he reached it he paused and looked back.

"I came here tuh help yuh," he said slowly.

"I told you not to talk!" said Helen, and she was trembling now. "Will you leave or must I shoot again?"

Solitaire made no attempt to answer as he backed slowly through the door. He was raging inwardly now, for he felt that this girl had made a fool of him. That was the trouble with women; you tried to help them and they turned against you and declared you an enemy before they even gave you a chance to explain.

As he moved away from the house the girl followed close behind him, still covering him with her revolver, her eyes blazing. He turned and started to speak as he reached the spot where the little gray stood patiently waiting, then he frowned and shook his head.

If she did not want his friendship he was not going to try and force himself upon her. He mounted reluctantly. It went against the grain for a man like the whistling waddy who had been his own boss all of his adventuring life to receive orders from any one, most of all this slender girl.

"Get off this ranch just as fast as you can travel," said Helen. "I mean what I say!" Again the gun in her hand barked, and a bullet tore through Solitaire's heavy black Stetson.

He did not linger any longer. This girl was crazy; she was likely to kill him at any moment. He touched the gray and was off at a gallop. As he rode away he began to whistle loudly.

Helen Shaw gave a start as she heard the musical notes. It was the same strange little sad tune that she had heard the man who had rescued her from Lomond whistling as he stood in the shadows outside the window of the Circle T.

This stranger then was the one who had saved her from the clutches of the white-faced lawyer and the two strange servants of Major Marsh, perhaps the same man that she had seen halt the sheriff and the deputy as she had glanced back there on the road leading from Festival. And she had called him a thief, had driven him away with bullets.

Helen started to speak as she stared after the retreating horseman, but no words issued from her lips. With a low moan she turned and rushed into the house, and dropped her head upon her hands as she slumped down at a chair by the kitchen table sobbing hysterically.

"She mighta let me say somethin'," murmured Solitaire as he rode away. "Ain't women hell!" Then he found himself smiling. "Still she's right spunky. I gotta say that." He felt in his pocket and drew out the spool of thread. "What yuh know about that? She didn't even give me a chance tuh give her this here present!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOT ARGUMENT.

THE hot sun beat steadily down upon two weary horsemen as they rode through the rocky stretch of country that lay between the little town of Festival and the Cross Bar J. They moved in single file along the faint trail that twisted and turned as they went onward.

On either side of them giant bowlders that were sometimes taller than horse and rider lined the way. The place was exceptionally calm and quiet, not even a faint breeze stirred to break the sweltering heat of the day.

The man in the lead, a dark, slender individual who wore a black mustache above his cruel mouth, occasionally addressed a remark to his companion, a hard-faced man with a jagged scar running across his left cheek, and the latter would answer. The sounds of their voices and the faint clatter of the horses' hoofs were all that could be heard.

Bill Hagen and his deputy, Tom Blake, were very tired and not in the best of humors. All night and most of the morning they had ridden steadily in search of Helen Shaw, and the fact that they had not even found a trace of the girl did not add to the amiability of either man.

"Th' girl must be at th' ranch," stated Hagen loudly as they rode along; he did not bother to look back at Blake. "We sure have covered this part of the country, an' if she ain't there then we'll know that she's headed for th' mountains."

"Right!" the deputy replied. "Say, Bill, I sure would like tuh run up against that fresh puncher that held us up on the road last night!"

"Me an' yuh both!" said the sheriff. "If we ever find him there's a nice cell waitin' for him back in town. I'll sure put him under arrest for interferin' with th' law."

"Why go tuh all that trouble." Blake laughed harshly. "I'm all for pluggin' him an' sayin' that he fired first!"

"Maybe yuh're right. MacGill is gonna be a roarin' hell-cat when he hears about that feller hornin' in! Who do yuh figure he is, anyway, Tom?"

"Aw, I don't know—just some fool that got a rush of crazy ideas in th' head when he seen us chasin' th' girl. He looked kinda worried like, though, when he seen your badge. I guess he got wise tuh th' fact that he'd made a wrong play then."

"Sure he did." Hagen laughed shortly. "I bet he's shook th' dust of this part of the country by now—looked tuh me like he was kinda yeller!"

"Uh-huh!" Blake leered at his companion's back. "I don't remember yuh makin' any move tuh be sure about that when he had us covered back there on the road. Them two guns of his made yuh act right peaceful like, Bill!"

"Is that so? Well, just about then yuh wasn't doing nothin' to brag about." As he spoke the sheriff rode around a huge rock on the left of the trail. "Go on; tell me how it happened that yuh didn't make any attempt tuh buck them two guns?"

Blake did not answer, and the sheriff laughed as he moved on.

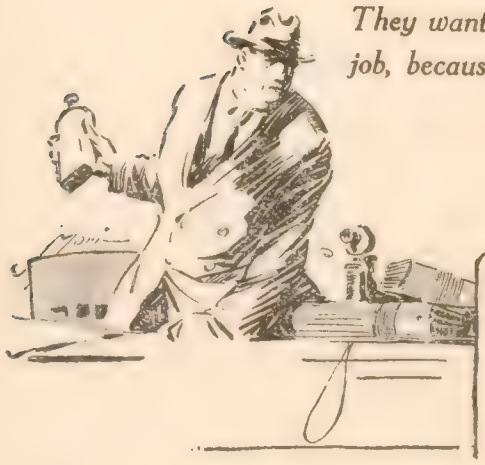
"Thought yuh didn't have no answer tuh that one," he remarked. "Well, go on, say somethin'— Yuh oughta been able tuh think up a right good excuse by now!"

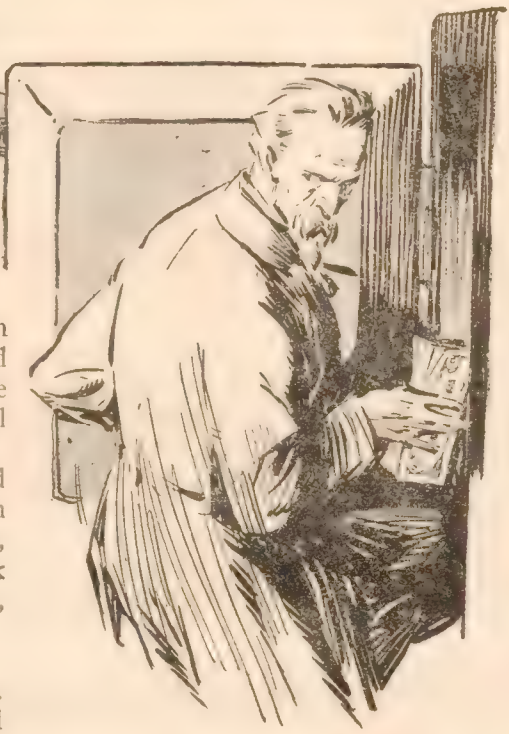
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Fair Exchange

They wanted to put the old bank president out of his job, because they thought he couldn't handle crooks

By ERIC HEATH





THERE was an air of tension in the large, mahogany furnished directors' room on the mezzanine floor of the Benton City National Bank.

James Hilton, chairman of the board of directors, a tall, stringy man with lean face and large, hawklike nose, rubbed his chin nervously as Mark Burroughs, who served as secretary, called the roll:

"Samuel Louderback?"

"Present," came a booming voice. The speaker was over six feet tall, and as he shifted in his chair his massive shoulder muscles were sharply outlined.

"Arthur Hannibal?"

"Right." Hannibal's voice was sharp and squeaky, fitting in admirably with his wizened up face and scrawny figure.

"Cyrus Brewer?"

"Brewer phoned me he wouldn't be able to get here," said Hilton. "He's down with another attack of rheumatism."

The secretary made a note in the minute book, then mumbled:

"Majority of the board present."

Chairman Hilton arose, and for a brief moment eyed the men before him, then said:

"Gentlemen, I feel that it has reached the time when I will have to bring up a subject that causes me a great deal of sorrow. And yet, in justice to our shareholders and ourselves, as well as the community at large, I believe it my duty to do so. I refer to our president and absent director, Colonel Cyrus Brewer."

The three men seated around the polished mahogany table turned questioning looks in his direction.

"I am very much afraid, gentlemen, that Colonel Brewer is getting too old, too infirm to hold the position of president of the Benton City National Bank any longer," went on Hilton bluntly.

"I need not tell you that this statement causes me a great deal of distress. No one is better aware of the long and splendid service Brewer has rendered to the bank. But, to be frank, this is the day of youth!

"As you all know, the Interstate Bank and Trust Company have opened a branch here and are looking forward to active competition with us.

"Their officers are all young and right up to the minute when it comes to modern banking methods. They have introduced many new ideas to obtain the good will of the people—and they're making their presence felt already, I tell you!

"We must meet fire with fire! Cyrus Brewer, as you all know, is a strict advocate of old-fashioned banking methods. In former days they were all right—but they won't go now!

"And in this connection, I call your attention to the bank robberies at Dixon and Medville. In both those cases the bank officials were well past their prime—entirely unable to cope with alert bandits. They even let a mere slip of a girl rob them with impunity!

"Not only to forestall undue loss of earnings through competition with the Interstate, but for protective purposes, I believe we should have a much younger man at the head of this banking institution.

"Gentlemen, I wish to submit a resolution in which we request Colonel Brewer to resign as president—on a pension, of course. I have the names of several men whom—"

"But," broke in Mark Burroughs, "you don't realize what you're proposing. Why, it would almost be the end of the colonel if we let him out. This bank is everything to him. And he's only sixty-eight. Aside from an occasional attack of rheumatism he's just as good as he was thirty years ago."

"I agree with you, Mark," said Samuel Louderback, when the other had finished speaking, "but, of course, business is business—"

"Yes," interrupted Hilton, "and there is absolutely no place for sentiment in the banking business. The whole question before you, gentlemen, is whether or not Cyrus Brewer is capable of running this bank against our new competition, and against that ever-menacing specter, the underworld.

"I maintain that he is *not*, and that unless we get a new and much younger president, we're due to lose thousands of dollars in deposits before many months."

"I motion," said Hannibal, "that this matter be given due consideration and taken up again at our next meeting. One thing is sure, I shall never sanction ousting Brewer until he's once more back in his usual good health, fully prepared for such a blow as it would be to him."

"I second that motion," said Burroughs.

"Me, too," spoke up Louderback.

"Inasmuch as no formal resolution has been made to be put to a vote," said Hilton grumpily, "I suggest that we consider this as an informal discussion and do not enter the subject in the minute book. Naturally, I will abide by the wishes of the majority, although I warn you that this matter will have to be settled, sooner or later."

II.

Colonel Cyrus Brewer entered the bank the next morning fully aware of all that had taken place at the board of directors' meeting.

Louderback had told his wife about the "ax" hovering over the colonel's head, and Louderback's wife had immediately told Mrs. Lafferty, her next-door neighbor.

Mrs. Lafferty, at the dinner table, had related the story to her husband and her son, Howard. Howard had carried the tale to Patricia, the colonel's daughter, who worked at nights in the library.

And Patricia, deciding that it would be better for her to break the news to her father than to allow him to be suddenly taken unawares at the bank, had told him everything.

But none of the employees of the bank noted any change in the "colonel" when he entered the rotunda of the bank.

To be sure he leaned heavily on his gnarled wood cane, and his lean face was a trifle paler than usual. But his clear blue eyes were as bright and youthful-appearing as ever, and he greeted every one with his customary cheery:

"Mawnin', everybody—fine, large day—yessiree!"

But as soon as he entered his private office and the door was closed, the colonel sank into a chair, breathing heavily.

He knew that he should not have come to work that day. His leg pained him terribly, and he felt rather dizzy and weak.

But when he had learned from Patricia that Hilton considered him too old for his job, his whole soul had arisen in rebellion. Hilton was a damn fool! Too old—bah! Why, he was as good as any two presidents like the young squirt at the new Interstate Bank.

And, so far as new-fangled systems went, that was all a lot of bunk. Depositors didn't want any of that hurrah stuff in their bank. What they wanted was dependability—good, old-fashioned dependability.

The colonel heard some one tapping on the door, and he hastily hung up his hat and cane and seated himself at his desk.

"Come right in," boomed the colonel.

The cashier entered with some papers, and for over an hour he and the colonel discussed various loans and kindred subjects.

After the cashier had gone, the colonel rang for his secretary and started dictating.

"I guess that'll be all, Liddy," he said after finishing one letter. "I reckon I'll have to look this heah stuff over before I can do much more."

Liddy, very discerning, gave a keen glance at his perspiring face, started to ask if he didn't think he should go home, thought better of it and left the office.

In a few moments she returned.

"There's a man wants to see you, sir," she said. "He says it's very important—something about financing an invention. Shall I have him come in?"

"Most certainly, Liddy," answered the colonel. "Tell the gentleman to step right in."

His secretary left, and almost at once a large, square-shouldered man of about forty years of age entered.

The newcomer's clothes were well cut, but somewhat shiny. His gray fedora hat was soiled, and there was a crack across the toe of one of his patent leather shoes. His face was heavily lined and somewhat sunburned. His eyes were bloodshot, and he blinked as a ray of sunshine from the window fell upon his face.

"Sit right down, suh," said Colonel Brewer, waving his hand to the chair at the opposite side of the desk.

"Thanks," murmured the man. He walked over and seated himself.

"Now, suh, what can I do foh you?" asked the colonel. He extended a box of perfectos. "Have a cigah?"

The other refused the proffered cigars, scrutinized the colonel for a brief moment, then replied:

"I have a little invention I want to show you."

"Of co'se you understand, suh," said the colonel, "that the bank does not finance inventions, but—"

"I think you'll finance this one," replied the man. His lips twisted into a sarcastic smile as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small vial of colorless liquid. He leaned over the desk and said in a low voice as he tapped the bottle with his forefinger:

"Do you know what this bottle contains?"

"Looks like watah," answered the colonel.

"Well, it ain't water," replied the man, "it's *nitroglycerin!*"

The colonel stared at the bottle as though fascinated. Then he bit off the end of the cigar he had taken from the box, and reached ostensibly for a match."

"You keep your hands still!" commanded the man. "One false move and I'll dash this bottle to the floor and blow the whole damn bank to hell!"

The colonel's hands became motionless.

"Just what is your game?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you in a minute," answered the other, "but first get what I say. If anybody comes in tell them not to bother you—that you're engaged—see?"

"And if I don't?" murmured the colonel.

"If you don't, then we'll all take a little trip to hell! I'm desperate, see! I haven't had a square meal for days—haven't got a damned cent. I've reached the point where I'm ready to commit suicide, if I have to. It all depends on you."

"I reckon if you had a good job, you would be all right," suggested the colonel.

"Good job, your eye!" exploded the other. "I want ten thousand dollars—and you're gonna give it to me!"

"Me?" demanded the colonel. As he spoke he looked reflectively at the telephone at his elbow.

"No use lookin' fer help," sneered the man. "If anything happens and I'm caught, I'll still have time to blow up the building with this." He indicated the bottle, which he now held clutched tightly in his right hand. "There's enough stuff in that to blow the whole damn works into the next county."

"I reckon you got the drop on me," conceded the colonel. "Jes' what do you want foh me to do?"

"I want you to ring your buzzer fer the cashier," said the man, with a triumphant glean in his narrow, catlike eyes. "Tell him to bring in ten thousand dollars in bills—fifty hundreds and five one-grand notes will do—I ain't particular.

"When he comes in you can be writin' out a promissory note—you know the stuff. Anyways, it's up to you to put it over without gettin' anybody suspicious, because you are wise now what it means if you don't put it over. One false move and I throw the bottle!"

"You don't need to worry," the colonel assured him. "I would not jeopardize the lives of my employees. If you and I were alone, that would be different. However, I wish that I could make you see the error of yo' ways. Don't you-all realize that money got that way won't do you no good at all?

"If you had come here askin' my help to get you work, I would have—"

"Can that stuff!" snapped the other. "Get the money and get it quick—or else, take the consequences."

"All right, all right," the colonel said hastily. He pointed to a small safe in the corner of the room. "You will find ten thousand dollahs in bills in a compartment of that safe. The combination is—"

"Say, what d'yer think I am—a chucklehead?" snarled the man. "I go over there an' open the safe while you knock me on the head—nothin' doin'. You go over and open the safe an' get the jack, see?"

"Mebbe that would be better," agreed the colonel.

Colonel Brewer arose and walked slowly to the safe in the corner of the office. As he stooped his bones cracked audibly and he could not repress a groan of pain.

"Been down with the rheumatism," he explained, as he twirled the knob.

The safe door swung open. The colonel fumbled around in a compartment, while the man stood by him, on the alert.

In a moment the colonel stood up. In his hand he held a manila envelope. He pulled out a package of yellowbacks and counted them slowly into the man's left hand.

"—seven — eight — nine — ten — there you are. Ten one-thousand-dollah bills. Is that right?"

At that instant there came a knock on the door. The man hastily stuffed the money into his pocket, then leaned over and whispered menacingly:

"Remember—no monkey business!"

"'Pon my honor, suh," said the colonel, "I'll let you out just as though you and I were old friends, yessiree."

He escorted the man to the door and opened it. Liddy was waiting outside.

"Pardon me," she said, "I thought you were alone."

"The gentleman is just goin'," said the colonel. "Good day, suh; good day, suh." He bowed to the man, who grinned and waved his hand in adieu as he walked hurriedly across the rotunda.

No sooner had the man disappeared from sight than the colonel brushed his secretary aside and dashed out after the robber. As he reached the sidewalk he jerked out a revolver from his coat pocket.

The man had evidently turned a corner, as he was nowhere in sight.

The colonel, forgetting his weakened condition, ran down the street, brandishing the revolver. As he rounded the corner, he bumped squarely into Constable Haynes.

"Well, for the love of Pete!" ejaculated the constable. "What's up?"

"A thief—he ran down the street!" wheezed the colonel painfully. "He—he came into the bank with a bottle of —of nitroglycerin—said he would blow—blow up the bank unless I gave him ten thousand dollahs—I gave—I gave him—"

And then the colonel slumped down into an inert heap on the sidewalk.

III.

At half past eight the following morning, the directors had gathered in the room on the mezzanine floor. Their faces were haggard, worried.

"Well, what did I tell you?" snapped Hilton. "Maybe *some day* you fellows will pay attention to what I say!"

"How's the colonel? Anybody heard?" demanded Louderback.

"Nobody's allowed to see him," replied Burroughs. "The doc reports that he's pretty bad."

"It 'll go hard on the old boy when he learns that he was scared into coughing up ten thousand dollars at the sight of *a bottle of water!*"

"Is the constable sure it was the same bottle the fellow was carrying?" asked Hannibal.

"Sure it was. Haynes found it in the ditch outside. It was marked 'Nitroglycerin,' but was nothing but plain, unadulterated H_2O!"

"Well," muttered Burroughs, "I guess there's nothing for it but to ask for Brewer's resignation—as soon as he's well again."

"Well, after all," exclaimed Louderback, "who wouldn't have done the same thing if he had been in his shoes? I would, for one."

"Rats!" sneered Hilton. "An alert man would have found a way out!"

Louderback, squelched, moved over to the window. He stared down for a moment, then turned with paling face.

"My Lord! They're starting a run on the bank. I was afraid of it when I saw that the newspaper let out that the fellow got away with a hundred thousand dollars, instead of ten. I'll bet

that reporter's palm was greased by Interstate!"

The directors joined him at the window. The doors of the bank had not opened as yet. In front of the building was an ever-increasing crowd of people, depositors of the bank. They were waiting for the doors to open to demand immediate payment of their accounts.

"We're ruined!" moaned Hannibal.

"Shut up!" exclaimed Hilton irritably. He turned to Burroughs. "You beat it for the depot and get the nine thirty train for Omaha. Explain the situation to the Federal Reserve there and have them bring over enough cash to tide us over. Understand?"

Burroughs did not answer.

"Just look at them coming!" groaned Louderback. "And see; there's MacReady, our biggest depositor!"

"Think we better open up?" asked Hannibal.

"Of course we'll have to," growled Hilton. "We may be able to stay them when we explain that the thief only got away with ten thousand.

"Of course all we got to go on is what Brewer told the constable. The bookkeepers haven't finished checking up yet.

"But even at that, people will probably lose confidence in the bank—and it's all on account of that old fogy. Imagine the fun they'll poke at the bank—being held up by a *bottle of water!* I tell you—"

"For pity's sake—look!" broke in Louderback. He pointed down. "It's the colonel or I'm crazy as a loon!"

IV.

SLOWLY, painfully, the colonel hobbled down the street toward the bank. At his side was his daughter, Patricia, a pretty, blond girl. She clung to his arm and whispered encouragement to him as they pushed through the throng in front of the building.

As they made their way toward the entrance to the bank, some of the men in the crowd started making remarks.

"How about a little water this morning, colonel?" jeered one.

"Hope you didn't give him all our money?" growled another.

The colonel ignored them. He reached the doors of the bank and then, with the help of Patricia, he managed to stand up on a projecting window ledge.

He stood there in full view of the crowd, mopping the perspiration from his brow.

Above, at the windows of the directors' room, Louderback, Hannibal, and Hilton glared down at him.

The colonel cleared his throat.

"Folks," he said, "I reckon you-all are heah to take yo' money out of the bank."

"You're darn tootin' we are!" yelled a man at the edge of the crowd.

"And why should you-all want to be doin' that?" demanded the colonel.

"We don't think your bank can stand for losing no hundred thousand dollars, that's why," answered some one, wrathfully.

"Friends, will you please let me explain," said the colonel. "This heah is the way it all happened: A man comes in the bank yesterday. He comes in my office when I'm alone and shows me a bottle.

"He said that it contained nitroglycerin and that he would blow up the bank if I didn't get ten thousand dollars—mark that, folks, only ten thousand—and give it to him."

"And the bottle only had *water* in it!" came a jeering voice.

"Yessiree, you are right!" exclaimed the colonel. His face broke into a smile. "And the money I gave him was only *counterfeit!*"

Gasps of astonishment broke from his auditors.

Burroughs on the window sill gave a loud whistle.

"You see," went on the colonel, "I

been in the banking business a long, long time. I figured some of these days some slick fellow would try a stunt like that one, and so I always kept a little counterfeit money in my office for just such an emergency."

As the truth finally percolated through the minds of the people in the crowd, they started laughing and cheering.

"Hurrah for the colonel!" yelled a man. "My money stays with the Benton City National!"

"Here, too!" agreed another.

And, as if by common consent, the laughing, cheering crowd started to disperse.

When they had gone, Patricia helped her father from the window ledge.

"I reckon I'll go in now, Pat," said the colonel.

"No, you won't!" came a voice at his elbow. It was Hilton. "You're going home to take a good rest."

"And if I do, do you-all figure I'll have a job when I come back?" demanded the colonel with twinkling eyes.

As Hilton tried to utter an affirmative reply, the colonel took his daughter's arm and started off.

THE END

The Hate of Attila

NEAR Downey, California, where wild horses rule the desert ranges, luring their kind to the freedom of the open spaces, one outlaw of the wind-swept trails has openly declared war upon man. This hatred for the human race, who have ever ruled the world and held all creatures in servitude, was kindled to action in the heart of Attila, a great white horse of the desert wastes.

The avenging stallion, named after Attila the famous leader of the hordes of Huns that overswept the Roman empire, has done something the like of which has never been heard tell of. He has led his band of savage horses to attack and kill domestic members of their kind.

His anger has been exercised upon tourists whom he has sent scurrying to safety while he and his band smashed the machines badly by their lashing hoofs.

But not long ago Attila led his army of vindictiveness in an attack upon a ranch. They killed three tame horses, slaves of the tyrannical brute called "man," put the entire crew of a big tractor to flight, and badly injured two farm hands, Threece Morgan and Kenneth Brown.

The men put up a game fight with rocks and boards, but were badly bruised by the flying hoofs of the vengeful mustangs. At last Morgan managed to make it to the chuck wagon, where there was a rifle. With this to aid him, he killed two gray mules and a bay horse that were members of the band.

Attila, seeing that horses have little chance against man's ingenuity, retreated to safety with his outlaw band.

And now horse hunters, armed with big rifles, are scouring the desert plains to make war upon Attila's invaders. They are determined to make the roads safe for tourists, and the ranches safe for those who run them.

And, as it has ever been, man will come out victorious in the fight, for he slays all that will not obey and serve him. But was there ever such a horse as the great white leader of the rebellious herd?

Guy Rader.

World Brigands

When big business pays the fiddler it calls the tune: and its mad dance in 1940 involved the fate of five nations

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Great Commander," "The Pancake Princess," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IN the new order which grew out of the chaos following the World War in 1918, Gus Tuttle, of cockney origin, rose in 1940 to be Sir Augustus Tuttle, owner of Winstut Abbey, and one of the most powerful financiers in England. The only threat on his security was America, who, in controlling the world money market, was forcing all Europe to the wall.

For years England, France, Germany, and Italy had paid the interest on their debt to the United States by borrowing from American financiers; but this source refused to lend any more. Sir Augustus and the Continental war profiteers stood to lose heavily if, through the repudiation of the war debt, European money lost its value.

American secret agents had discovered the sinister alliance of individuals representing each of the endangered nations, whose primary interest was in saving their recently acquired wealth; and it was feared they meant to incite their countries to war with America.

It was to ascertain the progress and exact nature of this plot that Dick Boswell was spending a week-end at the Abbey—where the conspirators were wont to gather—as the guest of the son, Roger.

It was toward this end that Dick had

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been prepared since two years after his athletic career at Harvard had terminated. He had been employed in the airplane plant of his multimillionaire father in Detroit, when a secret agency, backed by private millionaires who wanted to protect their interests, commandeered his services.

His preparation had consisted of establishing for himself in New York and London the reputation of a wild and silly ne'er-do-well. It was through this lurid reputation that he became friendly with Roger Tuttle, fool and spendthrift, and thus received the coveted invitation.

He was presented to a German and Frenchman, both incognito, whom he recognized from photographs supplied him. But, unconsciously, at the same time, he broke his first rule: "Don't fall in love."

But he really couldn't be blamed. Vesta, Roger's young sister, was so beautiful, so wise, that he was quite helpless. And then to act the fool! It maddened him.

Meanwhile, in another room, the Continental conspirators clustered about a table with Sir Augustus Tuttle.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSPIRATORS.

"IN 1945," the German was saying, "Europe will have reached the end of her rope. For five years neither England, France, Italy, nor Germany has balanced her budget, and all internal bond issues since 1937 have failed because our own people have completely lost confidence in our ability to pay, and those who have wealth have invested heavily in American securities. Am I not right?"

His auditors nodded.

"Our situation is beginning to be understood in the United States, and the big financiers are becoming alarmed; but the government and the public maintain their fatuous attitude. However, a change must soon come. America, aware of her danger, will arm, and what is easy now will become impossible."

"True," said Sir Augustus Tuttle. "If the debacle comes in Europe, there will be an uprising of the people similar to that in Russia in 1916, the overthrow of the ruling classes, the confiscation of private fortunes, and, most likely, the massacre of all persons of rank and prominence. Like you, gentlemen, I have seen war, and I hate it; but between war and my own destruction I have no alternative—nor have you."

"It would be an easy matter to influence the French people to defy America; to repudiate the debt to aliens both public and private," said M. Vauban; "and should all Europe act likewise, what could America do about it?"

The German thumped the table with his fist.

"Nothing. But the repudiation of debts is not enough. If a beggar owes a million dollars, repudiation of his debts will not feed and clothe him. He must have money. Since 1930 we've been bled of our money by America.

"We have completely lost foreign markets, and during the last five years we have been rapidly losing our own. We cannot compete with cheap American goods even in Germany. Our factories are closing one by one, our people are spending what little they have left buying American made clothes and tools and machines and motors, and eating American canned goods to the ruin of our farmers.

"We have three million men out of work, England has five million, France has two million, and, since the death of Mussolini, all Italian industries have come to the brink of ruin. We must work fast, for our starving masses will turn upon their rulers soon."

"This is all old information," said Sir Augustus impatiently. "Have you

convinced the German people that their troubles are entirely due to America, in the way in which we are rapidly succeeding in doing in England?"

The German nodded. "We have copied your propaganda, and it is working well. Of course we have not dared as yet to go beyond the demand for repudiation, but a few weeks' intensive work would make them eager to hurl themselves upon America. We await the word."

"And assurance of success," said the Frenchman. "America contains three million square miles and a hundred and sixty million people. We cannot conquer a country like that."

"Naturally not," retorted Sir Augustus. "Who spoke of conquest? This is a raid. Look."

He took a pencil and drew a line on the map of the United States from Portland, Maine, to Newport News. He extended it inland about a hundred miles.

"In this sector," he said, "lies Boston, Providence, the State of Connecticut, New York City, the State of New Jersey, the cities of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, the national capital.

"It contains a third of the wealth of America, seventy-five per cent of its war resources, and it is almost defenseless. A naval engagement will destroy the American navy, which is outnumbered four to one by our united fleets. Armies landed in Portland, Newport News, and in Narragansett Bay simultaneously can easily destroy or drive westward their scanty land forces, and the great cities, like ripe plums, will fall into our hands."

"And then the mighty hinterland comes against us and drives us into the sea," objected the Frenchman.

Sir Augustus frowned.

"This plan was prepared by a great British general in consultation with a German strategist of high rank, and one of your own staff, *monsieur*. Understand that we capture their great munition plants, destroy their regular army and their miserable national guard, for they will not dare retreat before us without a battle.

"It will take the West a year or two to raise and equip an army strong enough to molest us, and in six months we shall be gone. If America refuses to sue for peace, what does it matter?

"From New York City alone we can force a ransom of fifty billion dollars. We shall seize the gold of the nation wherever found. From this raid we shall return with wealth enough to set all Europe on its feet, and America in ten years will have completely recovered from her losses."

"The transport of millions across the Atlantic is still a tremendous undertaking," said the Frenchman.

"Nonsense," retorted Sir Augustus. "America showed us how. In the World War she transported safely two million men in a single year. To-day, with great air liners as well as the enormous merchant fleet of motor sea craft, we can send over two million men in six weeks.

"You forget," the German reminded him, "that the Allies controlled the seas in the World War. We had only a few score of submarines to oppose your transports."

"We shall sweep the seas of opposition," said Sir Augustus testily.

"Suppose the American navy refuses battle?" proposed the Frenchman. "What then?"

"We shall bottle it up in their harbors as the British Grand Fleet bottled up the German navy for the duration of the World War. Their aircraft and submarines will be outnumbered ten to one. And do not forget that we shall seize Portland, Maine, which has one of the finest harbors in the world for a naval base."

"While we are looting the great American seaboard cities," said the Frenchman, "your Western Americans may invade Canada. How are you going to protect Canada?"

Sir Augustus looked annoyed.

"My dear *monsieur,*" he said, "Canada will have to look after herself. The interests which we three represent are Europe's financiers; we are not patriotic nationals. As far as I am concerned, they may destroy Canada. However, we shall have plenty of troops to land in Montreal and beat off American attacks with the aid of the Canadians."

The Frenchman shook his head.

"I cannot forget that I am also a patriotic Frenchman, in addition to being the representative of moneyed private citizens. If you are prepared to sacrifice Canada, why should I object?

"However, to induce my people to go to war with America, she must commit some overt act, and how to make such a spineless government affront any foreign nation? Observe to what America submits from weak Mexico, which has been flouting her and murdering her citizens for twenty years unpunished."

"Animosity to Europe is being skillfully aroused in the United States," replied the Englishman. "Our agents are very active, and the ignorant Yankees play into their hands. We have spent millions in the past two or three years awakening racial antagonism, and resentment against our efforts to have the war debts canceled is working on our side.

"One fine day a note from our four nations couched in such a way that it will infuriate America will be presented, and the same day we shall mobilize as secretly as possible. The note will demand that America recognize conditions in Europe to the extent not only of canceling the war debts, but assuming the responsibility for all private loans to Europe from American citizens.

"This will be denied in an insolent manner, and declarations of war immediately will be passed in our national parliaments. But before the declarations, our fleets and transports will have taken the sea and the air. Upon the day of the declarations the descent will be made upon America."

"Very good," agreed Herr Stutt. "When is *der Tag?*"

"I need another six months to whip our government into the proper frame of mind," admitted Sir Augustus.

"Six months, at least," agreed the Frenchman.

"I could be ready in three months," said the German. "Now, Sir Augustus, what do your spies report regarding these mysterious American gasses. Have they any formidable secret defenses?"

"Let me ask if you Germans, who boast of being the world's greatest chemists, have invented a gas which will destroy a city?"

"Certainly not," replied Herr Stutt. "We have made certain improvements upon gasses used in the World War, and we have invented means of making them innoxious by counter discharges of gas."

"The Americans have powerful gas which will destroy all life within a limited radius, and so have we; and they have also improved masks so that persons properly equipped will be unharmed by them.

"They have done much with counter gasses. I believe they are ahead of our chemical department in that respect. But gas will not play anything like as important a rôle in this war as has been prophesied. I doubt, in view of modern methods of defense, if it will do as much damage as it did in the World War."

"Yet we should have to be very sure that they have nothing up their sleeves," said Stutt. "How about their airplanes? Recent statistics show that they have more commercial planes than all Europe put together."

"The planes are unarmed, and they have not even built guns for them. They have a very limited number of fast pursuit planes, and while heavy

commercial machines may be used for bombing, our information is they have not accumulated any appreciable amount of bombing ammunition."

"Has America any inkling of the soup which is in the pot for her?" asked the Frenchman.

"It wouldn't do her any good if there were a spy in the house to overhear this conversation," replied Sir Augustus. "The American government is much worse than our own. An effort to defend herself before a declaration of war would be violently opposed by a majority of Congress, and the Executive arm is impotent unless Congress votes money."

"There is an American in the house," said Ernest Goring. "This Mr. Boswell is the son of one of the great American industrials, and he doesn't look like a fool."

"Then appearances belie him," replied Sir Augustus, with a grim smile. "He is a friend of Roger's, but before I consented to his coming to Winstut Abbey I had him investigated. He is an imbecile, kicked out by his father, a vers libre poet, and, although I hate to make such an admission, the sort of friend my own son would be apt to attract."

"Sons of great men," said the Frenchman politely.

The German grinned sourly. "I have one. He conspires for the return of the damned Hohenzollerns."

"I am curious to know how you expect to bring the British Parliament to your point of view, Sir Augustus," said the French plotter. "My own countrymen can be worked into a frenzy of warlike enthusiasm very easily. Many of the deputies are venal, and we have our national military organization. But your Democrats and Laborites—how can you influence them?"

"Our national honor," smiled Sir Augustus. "Do you suppose England, as a nation, wanted to enter the war of 1914? Do you suppose a war referendum would not have been beaten three to one? We maneuver our country into a position from which she cannot back down with honor, and then everything goes with a hip-hurrah.

"We had a strong party financed from Russia some fifteen years ago who were violent pacifists, if you know what I mean. Since Russia became an Oriental despotism no money has come to our Communists, and they have dwindled to insignificance. Besides, we shall show our hungry unemployed how to fill their stomachs. It will not be difficult."

The German was studying the map.

"What fools!" he declared. "Here is Washington only a short distance from the ocean. In the war with England in 1812, British troops captured it and destroyed it. That should have taught them that a nation's capital should be in the heart of the country.

"St. Louis is the logical capital. The great factories and munition plants should be in the States of Illinois and Kansas and Missouri. Then we might take New York, and what good would it do us?

"From the uninjured nerve center of the nation the national organization would function, and soon we should find a well armed force of ten million men moving against us. Instead, America lies at the mercy of a powerful enemy. She is no farther from us than Paris was from the Rhine in 1914, counting days' marches.

"Two days in a troop plane, five days on a battleship and there she lies, the richest prize that was ever dangled before the eyes of penniless nations. A hundred billion dollars, you say? Gentlemen, I think we may squeeze more than that from this golden goose. Now I bid you good night. I must be in Berlin by early morning."

"And I," said the Frenchman. "I do not wish my absence from Paris to be suspected. I also must depart. Please express my regrets to the ladies."

"I will see you to your planes," said Sir Augustus like a good host.

And during this absorbing conference Dick Boswell leaned on the piano and drank in the beauty of Vesta with his eyes, while his ears drank in the delicious harmonies of Debussy, the thrilling rhapsodies of Liszt, and the voluptuous rhythms of Rimsky Korsakoff.

After all he would have learned nothing beyond what his mysterious chief already surmised, and he might have jeopardized his prospects of being of especial value to his service if he had been rash enough to prowl about and listen at doors.

These international bandits had only mentioned, regarding the invasion, what every American chief of staff had told his government for a quarter of a century: that the vitals of America were worn on the outside of her, unguarded and impossible adequately to guard. And American financiers had already discovered there was a conspiracy among the wealthy men of Europe to make America settle all their bills and set them up in business again.

The breaking up of one of the bridge tables drew the players to the piano and Vesta swung about upon the piano stool to suggest dancing. A footman opened a wall panel and revealed a powerful radio set upon which he picked up the Hotel Savoy grill in London where a Hungarian band was playing the latest dance steps—American jazz dances had gone into oblivion along with the polka, the quadrille, and the two-step.

Dick wished to dance with his hostess, but she was always in the arms of some one else, and at twelve thirty the guests began to retire. He knew that she had deliberately avoided dancing with him, but there was nothing he could do about it. At least she had played for him alone for more than an hour.

He found the big bed in the Walnut room comfortable enough. He slept the more soundly because he was ignorant of the importance of the conference which had taken place that night in Winstut Abbey.

He wakened early and descended to find the breakfast room empty. A waiter was on hand to serve him from the numerous covered dishes on the buffet, and he lingered long at breakfast hoping that Vesta might come upon him. Instead, as he was finishing, the Drooms came in together. He made his excuses and left them.

It was a beautiful morning and the outdoors called him. He wandered through the gardens and eventually found himself upon the flying field. A small two-seater was tuning up and the aviator touched his cap respectfully as Dick approached.

"Going to make a flight?" he asked the man in livery.

"Sir Augustus is going up to London in an hour, sir," said the aviator. "He often runs up for a few hours on Fridays and Saturdays, though the house is full of guests. He is always back for dinner."

"That's a neat little job," Dick admired. "She looks fast."

"She is, sir, I can get two hundred miles if I push her. You're American, if I may be so bold."

"Correct."

"A flying man yourself, sir?"

"I have done quite a little. My father builds airplanes in Detroit."

The chauffeur looked interested. "I know the Boswell machines very well, sir. They are more for comfort than for speed."

"Yes. Comfort and safety. Have you been in America?"

"Yes, sir. I tested mail carriers for a couple of years. I was born in this county and my father died and left me a bit of property, so I came home."

"A lot of flying from this field," said Dick, eying the ground expertly. "I should say that many of the guests come here by plane."

"Aye, sir, especially the foreign gen-

tlemen. It's swifter and more private than boats and trains."

Dick inspected the engine of the light machine rather carefully, then nodded to the air chauffeur and drifted back toward the house. There was nothing suspicious in the use of airplanes in connection with a country estate nowadays. Had he not recognized two of the Continentals whose photographs had been sent to him by his chief, he would still be inclined to believe that the inclusion of Sir Augustus among the conspirators against America was preposterous.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN CALLED BROWN.

CERTAINLY nothing transpired during the next three days to indicate that an international conspiracy centered at Winstut Abbey. The disappearance of the foreign guests caused no emotion among the survivors, for these were insular enough to dislike all Continentals and to be none too effusive toward the lone American; and the arrival of two proper young men of their own sort restored the necessary proportion of men to women.

During the day they amused themselves according to their taste. Vesta made no effort to lay out a program as American hostesses love to do. Some rode, some played tennis, golf, billiards, or bridge.

Roger and Dick had more time together than was to the liking of the American. It was impossible to detest Roger and Dick liked the fellow; but he was a very tedious companion. While Vesta, who had begun by devoting attention to Dick, now ignored him.

Evidently she had catalogued him to her satisfaction and put him in a pigeon hole. He had hoped for more music, but she suddenly developed a great interest in contract bridge.

Dick was an excellent player, but he dared not exhibit his skill in view of his rôle. He contented himself with aimless chatter with various persons who were not so engaged. And when he was leaving with Roger he received a chilly and evidently untruthful statement from Vesta that she was delighted to have met him and looked forward to his return at some future time.

He returned to his lodgings, a sumptuous apartment in the Hotel Grand Luxor, in a sullen frame of mind, having got rid of Roger only by promising to dine with him.

An hour later his bell rang and, upon his personal servant opening the door, a waiter entered with a card. The fellow was small, dark, clean-shaved, and unsummoned.

"I'm not hungry—" Dick began, but the mystic letters which had been spoken by the man on the park bench caused him to stare and choke off his indignation.

"My man?" Dick asked.

"Send him on an errand," said the waiter in a very low tone.

"Fielding," he called, "go to Waterloo Station and get me a compartment to Southampton for day after to-morrow," he called.

Fielding, an English servant whom he had hired on his arrival in London, stared, but bowed respectfully. "Right away, sir?"

"Immediately. Give me the menu, waiter."

When the door had closed on Fielding, he scrutinized his visitor.

"You have as many disguises as a story book detective," he laughed. "Sit down. We are quite alone."

"Thanks. You may give me a drink," the false waiter seated himself in an armchair and crossed his legs.

"What do you really look like. You had brown hair last time I saw you."

"These are my regular features, but I've put on a black wig and darkened my skin," said the Unknown. "Any news?"

"Two of your photographs turned up, Stutt and Lucien Vaurien, both un-

der assumed names. Tuttle carried them off immediately after dinner and we never saw them again. I haven't any notion what it was about and I'm afraid I am an awful flop as a spy."

"That's all right," said his chief flicking ashes from his cigarette into a distant ash tray. "I told you not to do any snooping. I want you to be invited down there regularly."

"This might have been a legitimate business conference," Dick ventured. "Maybe they're forming some kind of International Trust. It's hard to believe that old peacock of a Tuttle is bloodthirsty."

"You'll believe it before you get much deeper into this, Boswell," said the other. "Stutt was supposed to be entertaining at dinner in his own home in Berlin that night and Vaurien was thought to be dining with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. You identified them positively?"

"I'm pretty sure. They certainly looked like the photographs."

"It's what I wanted to know."

"Say, what am I to call you?" asked Dick rather testily. "And do you really think all this mystery is necessary?"

"Call me Brown, if you like. The mystery is for your own sake. In your character you cannot be holding meetings with persons who may come under suspicion. My life isn't worth a plugged nickel at this minute and if they get on to you, a promising young American will die violently in London."

Dick laughed scornfully. "Quit your joshing," he said. "Sir Augustus isn't going in for assassination."

Mr. "Brown" did not join in the laughter. "Money has no scruples," he replied. "The outfit of which he is a prominent member wouldn't hesitate one second to snuff you out. They haven't got their own governments entirely in hand yet and they are all guilty of high treason in conspiring to hurl their nations into a war so you may be sure they are taking their precautions."

"You seem to have a lot of dope," admired Dick. "Assuming that you are right and these financiers are scheming to descend upon the United States; assuming that you get proof of it, what are you going to do about it? Nobody in America would take an unofficial conspiracy seriously.

"You can't make Americans prepare for war when the world is at peace. In 1917, after Europe had been ablaze three years we went into the war without any previous preparation whatever.

"If we hadn't happened to have great munitions and arms factories which had been supplying the Allies since 1914 we couldn't have landed a hundred thousand soldiers in Europe in a year, let alone two millions."

"True," replied the waiter. "Our Congress had always refused to look facts in the face, but I am not endeavoring to get the goods on Sir Augustus and his gang to present it to a committee of Congress. By the time they had succeeded in proving that my documents were all forgeries a European army would have landed on our shores."

"Then what are you up to?" he demanded curiously.

Brown laughed. "Don't you worry about that, Boswell. You are a very important pawn in this game and pawns must not know too much in case they happen to be captured. Continue to cultivate young Tuttle. Get yourself frequently invited to Winstut and stand ready to carry out any other instructions."

"What's your real name?" pleaded Dick.

"My real name wouldn't mean any more to you than Brown. You are sure you don't want anything to eat?"

"Not now, old man."

"Well, you may not hear from me for a week or two. Just go ahead like a pleasant young spendthrift. Can you think of something particularly foolish to pull off in the next few days?"

"Oh, Lord," groaned the young man. "Haven't I done enough?"

"Let's see. Do you know Renée Prévost, the diseuse, who is working at the Modern Theater?"

"Haven't the pleasure."

"Get chummy with her. She is a real wild woman and you've got to travel to keep up with her. Throw parties for her and have her bring all her friends, especially her men friends. Get your name coupled with hers."

Dick groaned again. "Ah, say!" he protested. "Can't I just be foolish and keep out of scandal? I have a reason—"

Brown took a step in his direction and inspected him with a penetrating black eye. "Reasons. Are you falling in love with some woman over here?"

Dick colored violently, but attempted to deny it.

"Who is she?" Brown demanded harshly. "Come on. Out with it."

"Well, I—it's not falling in love, but the fact is that I've seen a girl—it's Vesta Tuttle."

"Don't blame you," said Brown unexpectedly. "She's the loveliest thing I ever set eyes on, but you are engaged in a business which may get her father hanged. What does she think of you?"

"I'm afraid she thinks I'm a blamed fool."

"Then see that she doesn't change her opinion. Your orders are to go after Renée Prévost. Are you going to play the game?"

"Yes," said Dick sullenly.

"Good boy, Boswell. I am an Englishman by birth. I spent three years at Oxford after I graduated from Princeton. I love England and I admire the English people. I am working in their interests as well as my own.

"I'll tell you something. Tuttle is a rotter. He laid the beginning of his fortune by stealing money from his own government when he was in the commissary department of the army during the war.

"He is execrated by the better class of Englishmen to-day, men, unfortunately, shoved aside by this upstart generation. Tuttle considers himself the head of this conspiracy, but he never had ingenuity enough to invent it.

"Stutt is the originator, and back of him is the dictator of Russia. England and France are cat's-paws in this game. First America, then England and France will be the victims. In the long run, Russia will be the only winner. It's up to a small band of Americans to save not only our own country, but the nations we like best in Europe. Until the job is done we cannot afford to fall in love. Do you understand?"

"I can't help being in love," admitted Dick, "but you can depend on me to do my job. I'll arrange to meet this Frenchwoman immediately."

Brown gave him a very winning smile, then froze into the well trained waiter, bowed stiffly and stalked from the room.

Tremendously impressed by the conversation, Dick picked up a newspaper and turned to the theater advertisements. There it was:

MODERN THEATER

Mlle. Renée Prévost, diseuse, and an imposing array of stars of the vaudeville and music hall world

Evenings at 8.30

He phoned downstairs. "Get me two seats in the front row if possible for the Modern Theater to-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

MADEMOISELLE PRÉVOST.

IT is probable that Renée Prévost had been born a brunette, for her eyes were dark brown, but at the present moment she was as blond as art could make an artist. Her hair was pale yellow, her eyebrows and lashes reddish gold, her complexion as pink and white as creams and rouge could

manage, her arms powdered to gleaming whiteness, her neck and shoulders dazzling as snow when the sun shines on it.

The figure of La Prévost—whatever may be said of the facial beauty of French women, the form has always been superb!

The long billowing skirts of 1940 muffled the figures of the Englishwoman and the American, but the Frenchwoman used them for revealing rather than concealing. When La Prévost sang, when she leaned forward, grasped the skirt in her right hand and lifted it slowly, teasingly, and revealed a slender ankle and a swelling calf—what coquetry, what allure, what provocation to a generation of males unaccustomed to the brazen display of the female leg!

Strictly speaking, Renée was not beautiful. Her nose was too big and her mouth too wide; but her eyes were overwhelming and her smile was irresistible. She had come from Paris only two weeks ago and was singing to an audience which did not understand French any better than previous generations of English, but her pantomime they understood.

She had revived the art of Yvette Gilbert, an art more of speaking than singing, and she put over delicious little songs with a toss of her head, the twitter of an eyelash, and the squeak of a small birdlike voice.

In Paris she had enjoyed a success of estime which is agreeable, though not profitable, but in London she was already a sensation. Dick was out front that night with Roger, and if he were not carried away so completely by the wicked little woman as was his ingenuous friend he was sufficiently influenced by her.

"We've got to meet her, Roger," he declared. "That young lady needs the influence of a couple of good men."

"Right you are, my hearty," declared Roger. "This exquisite foreign visitor requires the proper guidance. She might get lost in a London fog or fall into wrong hands. The question is whether she isn't all dated up already. She's been in town two weeks."

"I don't suppose she would pay much attention to a note sent around to her dressing room."

"Let us take no chances. We'll find the manager and see that we are properly introduced."

"Do you know him?"

"That's one I've overlooked," admitted the son of Sir Augustus. "However, I find that the name of Tuttle carries a lot of weight with managers. And I'll wager he has heard of you."

Dick winced, but managed a triumphant grin. "Let's find him. You introduce me and I'll introduce you," he proposed. Although there was more to the show, they climbed over half a dozen patrons and sought the box office.

"Will you tell the house manager that Sir Augustus Tuttle would whisper in his ear?" demanded Roger.

A small, fat Hebrew, clean-shaved, bushy of eyebrows and bald of head, who had been sitting at the rear of the box office, immediately came forward.

"I'm Mr. Abrams, the house manager," he declared, "but you are not Sir Augustus Tuttle."

"Well, practically I am," declared Roger with an engaging grin. "I'm his only son and heir. How's that, Mr. Abrams?"

"I'll be out," replied the manager. A moment later he came into the lobby.

"This," declared Roger, "is none other than Richard Boswell, Jr., of Detroit, whose father owns most of North and South America."

The manager grinned derisively. "The fellow that starred Amy Desmond in New York last year? How are ye, Mr. Boswell."

"I see my reputation has crossed the sea," said Dick almost ruefully.

"I was in New York last season

picking up acts. What can I do for you, gents?"

"We want to go back and meet the French dazzler," stated Roger. "And we want you to introduce us and say the proper thing to interest a French *mademoiselle.*"

"Tell her how rich you are," grinned the manager. "I don't think you boys have a chance. Lord Humphries has taken her under his wing."

"That old cockalorum will have to take a back seat from now on," Roger replied confidently. "Come on, Abrams. Dick here will make it worth your while."

"I'll see what I can do," said the manager. "Wait here, please."

"That's the way to handle those chaps," said Roger. "You'll have to slip him a five pun note, Dick. I'm flat."

"As usual," smiled Dick. "Here, you give it to him. You can do it with the air of conferring a pension."

In a few moments Abrams was back. "She'll give you a few minutes," he puffed. "I had to use all my influence, I can tell you."

"Good man," admired Roger. "With this piece of paper you can go far."

He thrust on the manager the five pound note, which Abrams accepted without embarrassment. "This way, boys," he warned.

He led them out of the lobby, down a narrow alley and through the stage door. Stage doors in 1940 had not changed in any degree from those of the first quarter of the century.

The manager tapped on a dressing room door and pushed it open. Attired for the street in a mouselike costume of gray, the diseuse awaited them. Dick, who knew his companion thoroughly, sensed the dismay of Roger Tuttle. Roger had rushed back to meet a bird of Paradise and saw an English sparrow, though Renée was not English. She smiled and some of her charm returned.

"Son of Sir Augustus Tuttle and son of Richard Boswell, big American millionaire," heralded Mr. Abrams. "Off their heads about you, *mademoiselle.* So long."

Renée laughed delightfully. "It is ze grreat honor, shentlemen. I 'ave heard of Sir Augustus Tuttle, and I adore ze Amerricaines."

"We wish to congratulate you, *mademoiselle,* upon your performance," said Dick perfunctorily.

"You like? *Bon.* I 'ope you come often. Is zat all?"

"*Mademoiselle,*" said Roger, who had come again under her spell when she smiled and spoke, "that's just the overture. We thought you might accompany us to the Club de Nuit de Paris."

"I 'ave visited it last night and all ze ozzer nights," she replied. "I am disappoint. You are not *très originale, messieurs.*"

"We should be pleased to escort you anywhere in London, pleased and proud," said Dick.

"It is *dommage,* but I have engagement for to-night. It is very dull, Londres."

"Always was until you came," retorted Roger. "Think of something very snappy, Dick. We're losing her."

Renée laughed heartily and Dick joined her.

"Perhaps you might permit me to arrange an entertainment for you less stereotyped than London's usual," he ventured. "If you will promise us your first free evening, I'll promise you something not in the least dull."

"To-morrow night," said Renée promptly. "You are more resourceful, *monsieur,* than your friend. But you must not disappoint. I expect something bizarre."

"Fear not," Roger exclaimed. "Old Dick is the lad. It was he who took a whole chorus bathing in the Serpentine at midnight."

"*Excusez-moi!*" cried Renée. "I like not the bath in cold water."

"I never do the same thing twice," Dick assured her. "*Au revoir, mademoiselle.* We'll call for you about ten thirty."

"Eleven. I shall need time to dress."

They departed. Dick, aware that he had interested the French woman, was both elated and regretful because of it.

"What's the trick, Dick?" demanded Roger.

"I haven't the faintest idea, but we were going down for the third time in the lady's estimation."

Roger sniffed. "Precious small loss. When that woman comes off the stage she drops ninety per cent of her personality in the wings. Why, she was the most gorgeous creature I ever saw from the front and now she looks like Jenny Wren. The Club de Nuit de Paris is not good enough for her? It's good enough for the royal princes."

"Well, we'll serve her a different dish. I have it. Around in Baker Street there is an abandoned police station. I saw that the windows were all boarded up when I came by there a few days ago. We'll hire the place, Roger, dress up a lot of waiters as policemen, and bring the guests there in a patrol wagon.

"It will be a night club raid, get me. We'll stage a night in jail. We'll have singing policemen, hire performers to impersonate very hard characters, give the folks a new kind of thrill and serve them a prison supper. Make them eat without knives or forks."

Roger looked enchanted. "My eye!" he exclaimed, "you have an imagination. It will be the talk of the town, but it'll cost beaucoup dinero, friend of my heart."

"I'll foot the bills."

"I agree to that heartily, but why do it for La Prévost? You are not hipped on her, are you?"

"Insane about her for the time being."

Roger stopped in the street and tapped him on the shoulder. "With my interest in her I thee endow. I shall take Marjorie Gallup. There's a bouncing beauty."

"Do you think we can get the station house?"

"Why not? It's abandoned, probably for sale. Nobody would want to rent it. Too many unpleasant memories."

"Come home with me and we'll make out a list of guests. You'll have to stay all night and be up bright and early making arrangements. We must find the government agent who has authority to turn it over, and we must decide upon our entertainers. There is work ahead for you, Roger."

"If all labor were a labor of love," sighed the young Englishman. "Dick, this beats the Serpentine."

"That was nothing." He was still ashamed of the Serpentine episode. Vesta Tuttle represented decent opinion regarding that. What would she think of this? He knew.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNCIL OF DEFENSE.

IN the splendid directors' room of a splendid bank in New York City on the afternoon of the day when Dick so reluctantly sought the acquaintance of Renée Prévost, eight men of middle age and somewhat more were assembled about a long mahogany table.

If the newspapers had been aware of the identity of most of them, the street outside would have been blocked by reporters. But pains had been taken not to advertise this conference. Only three of the eight were New Yorkers, and none of the others were known to be visiting the city.

They had not all been acquainted when they assembled, but the president of the Bank of New York and America had performed the necessary introductions. It was a few minutes before three in the afternoon, and the outer offices of a bank which had five billions

of dollars of assets were thronged with customers through whom these men had passed without attracting attention, entering one by one, and being conducted immediately into the directors' room.

At the stroke of three Richard Boswell of Detroit had stepped to the table and rapped smartly upon it with a small gavel.

"Please take seats, gentlemen," he said. "This meeting will come to order."

When they were in their places about the table he cleared his throat and began with some diffidence.

"I have been asked to act as temporary chairman," he said. "I hope you will elect a more suitable permanent chairman. Our purpose in coming here is known to all of you. Because of his official position, Mr. Merrick is here only as an observer."

He bowed to the man who was responsible for the present antics of Dick Boswell.

"In Mr. Averill Grant," Boswell continued, "we have the banking industry well represented. You, Mr. Greggson, certainly can speak for coal and steel. Mr. Fuller ably represents the automobile and allied industries.

"Mr. Abbott's reputation in railroads is known to you all. General Peterson was a great chief of staff until our army retired him by the absurd age limitation last year.

"I am authorized to take action for the youngest of our great industries, the airplane. Admiral Graves, United States Navy retired, did all that was humanly possible for our navy during his long service. We are met to form a Council of American Defense, to do what we can to avert the calamity which is about to fall upon unprepared America."

"I move that Mr. Boswell be continued in the chair," said Leonard Greggson. "He is already more fully informed upon the situation than any of us."

The motion was seconded and carried unanimously. After expressing his appreciation of their confidence, Mr. Boswell continued:

"I am going to ask General Peterson to tell us frankly the condition of our army," said the chairman.

The general, a rather short, but soldierly man of sixty-five, who looked ten years younger, laid down his cigar.

"We have in our regular forces about one hundred and fifty thousand men. Of these, twenty thousand are at Panama, fifteen thousand in Hawaii, and thirty thousand in the Philippines. We could move some eighty thousand men to the defense of New York in two or three days. Our motor transport, what there is of it, is excellent; our aviation service small, but admirable; our field artillery efficient for an army of this size."

"General," asked Averill Grant, "could you defend New York with this force?"

The general laughed harshly. "Against twice its number, perhaps. If there is an invasion they will land at some unprotected port at least half a million men and follow it up within a few weeks with another million."

"And what would the navy be doing?" asked Mr. Grant.

The admiral answered: "Getting sunk. Fighting bravely against impossible odds, our men laying down their lives upon the altar of selfishness, greed, folly, and incompetency. If this invasion comes we shall be outnumbered four or five ships to one."

"There is no doubt in your mind, admiral, that a great expeditionary force could be landed on our shores?"

"None. How can we stop it?"

"I had not finished," said General Peterson. "On paper we have a reserve force of three-quarters of a million, consisting of national guard and national reserves. For a few years after the war, the government was active in organizing and training this force, but in recent years it has

been neglected. I doubt if we are able to arm it. It's the same old story, gentlemen. We never have been prepared for war, and we never shall be. The Allies fought our battles against Germany for a year and a half after the declaration. We were just getting efficient when the armistice was signed."

"What can be done to bring about adequate preparation?" asked Mr. Greggson.

"Have a revolution," sneered the general. "Our government spent more money last year trying to enforce prohibition than upon the national army."

"Would it be possible to create public sentiment in favor of a strong army and navy?" asked Mr. Grant.

"I doubt it very much," replied General Peterson. "For ten years old women have been running this country. I don't have to tell you how the character of our Congress has degenerated. Five years ago I was called before a Congressional committee and found two old maids among the members."

"If you will pardon me," said Mr. Merrick. "It has taken a year to get public sentiment worked up sufficiently to provide funds for a greatly enlarged army and navy, and another year or two will be needed to build them up, provided the money is voted by Congress. What is going to happen to us will happen inside of a year, I am very much afraid."

"Well," said Mr. Greggson. "Suppose we are invaded. What will happen, general?"

"Your Atlantic seaboard will fall into the hands of the Allies," replied the military man. "We can't stop them."

"Most likely our navy will be ordered to commit suicide, and will obey orders, and our poor little army will offer battle and be totally destroyed. We haven't got a chance, gentlemen. About ten per cent of the war indemnity we shall be forced to pay would have insured us against war.

"You have been so busy grabbing the markets of the world and building up the greatest industries ever known to man that you forgot to protect yourselves. We are here to tell one another the truth, I hope."

The sleek, plump captains of industry gazed at him in alarm.

"As a result of your inattention to the matter of police, you will lose three-quarters of your accumulations and have most of the rest taken away from you by war taxation," continued the general grimly.

"Surely," protested Averill Grant, "there must be some way to avoid this war." He was a tall, angular New Englander, with a thick gray mustache, thin gray hair and drooping eyelids, whose appearance belied his terrific energy and ability.

"If there is, I suggest that you discover it," retorted the general. "With the concurrence of you gentlemen, the army and navy have been starved for twenty years."

"To prevent this war is the reason for our organization," said Mr. Boswell quietly. "For two or three years past we have maintained a secret service of our own in Europe. We have discovered the source of the insidious and dangerous anti-American propaganda which has already created a belligerent mood in Europe.

"We know the names of the ringleaders in the plot against us, and our hope is to get warning in time of the onslaught so that we may take some measures for self-preservation."

"General," asked Mr. Fuller, "is there any reason why we cannot be told everything? Is it possible that America has no secret and tremendously powerful weapon of defense? I have often heard rumors of marvelous discoveries by our chemists and scientists. I read in a newspaper a story about a light ray—"

General Peterson laughed unpleasantly. "Bunk," he declared. "We have tried to keep pace with modern

inventions and discoveries, but we have had little funds for research of that description, and our secret service is so inadequate that if Germany or England had found something to revolutionize war we haven't learned it.

"War gets down, in the long run, to a struggle between men on foot with rifles in their hands, and the nation with the greatest man power wins. We have enormously improved the range of our guns, the strength of our armor, the speed of our airplanes, and the power of our explosives since the World War; but so has everybody else.

"We have no magic rays, and neither have the enemy. Gas is a tremendously overrated instrument of war. Ship for ship and man for man we are as good as any one of our opponents, but, if Europe unites against us we shall be overwhelmed."

There was silence for a moment. The old general seemed to draw pleasure from their dismay. "You had it in your power to make America so strong that no enemy would dare come against her. You preferred to pay off a piffling national debt so as to reduce your taxes.

"There are four million men under arms in Europe to-day, supported by nations whose total resources are a tenth of ours—"

"And that is why they are bankrupt," interrupted Greggson.

"That is why they are going to make us pay their bills," he replied.

"As a military man, what do you suggest?" asked Boswell.

"I suggest that our navy retreat to the Gulf and our army retire without firing a shot to the Mississippi River," he replied. "That our banks send their cash resources to the west, and our population move out, as did the French, from the war zone. Give them our national capital and our seaboard cities; we can't defend them."

"Impossible! Unthinkable! Cowardly! Preposterous!" came from around the table.

"I don't say we'll do it," he replied. "We'll make a fight and be exterminated. But that is what we ought to do."

"The thing we must do is to prevent the war," said Greggson. "The general is correct. We are at the mercy of the invaders if they come. Our business is to see that the war either does not take place or is delayed long enough to enable us to put ourselves in a state of defense.

"As I understand it, no government in Europe as yet is committed to the scheme, it is the idea of the big financial interests.

"We are the financial interests of America, yet we could not force our government into war; we cannot even induce it to prepare to defend itself. Mr. Boswell, what makes you think that Sir Augustus Tuttle and his fellow conspirators will be more powerful?"

"Conditions abroad are desperate," replied Mr. Boswell. "For years the masses have been taught that we are the cause of their trouble. The terrific military and naval expenses which have continued to increase despite the existence of the League of Nations, the breaking down of their industrial machinery, the antiquated methods, which are really responsible for their financial distress, have been camouflaged as war debts to America.

"Although their war payments to us have been made by means of money loaned to them by our private citizens, they have made the people think that they are being bled to fatten a nation already too fat.

"We are execrated by the ignorant all over Europe. Our wealthy tourists who spend a billion dollars a year abroad are shown to the public as proof of the prosperity which America has stolen from Europe.

"As soon as they are told that they are going to war with us to get back their own, that they will bring back the wealth of America to set their own

countries on their feet they will welcome the idea with enthusiasm.

"From the standpoint of the public it will be a tremendously popular war. The effect of the propaganda so far is appalling. A government which hangs back when the moment comes will be thrown out and a war government set up."

"Would they be satisfied with the cancellation of the war debt?" asked Averill Grant.

"No, not now. Money they haven't got and expect to pay at some future time isn't very alluring. The billions of bonds upon which they are paying interest to American citizens might be returned to them by us and it would be a sop which wouldn't satisfy. They want our wealth. They want billions of new money.

"Every peasant in Europe will expect to get enough prize money to buy good clothes and own an automobile. According to our secret agents in Europe, the descent upon America must be made soon or a terrific explosion will take place.

"There will be a rising of the common people, a massacre of the upper classes, the repudiation of all debts, Russia in 1917 over again. All that can save the ruling element is what saved the patricians of Rome on several occasions, the payment of money and the delivery of free food to the plebeians, and they look to us to supply that.

"For a year or two longer the governments can carry on and command the services of the armies and navies; after that chaos. They consider us utterly defenseless, so the cost of the war to them will be inconsiderable while the indemnity they will exact will throw the United States into poverty for fifty years."

"I take it," said the admiral, "that our inability to put up a big fight is the chief temptation. If we were as strong as they, there would be no war, for they couldn't stand the expense of it."

"Desperate as they are they would hesitate," said Mr. Boswell.

The old sailor laughed suddenly, and the others looked at him in astonishment.

"I suppose the country is full of their spies," he said, recovering from his mirth unseemly.

"Spies and propaganda agents," replied the chairman. "This wave of resentment over here against cancellation of war debts and repudiation of bonds seems to be their work."

"Is there any hope for Europe? Could she be put upon a sound, solvent basis?" asked the admiral. "You gentlemen ought to know."

"Yes," said the great banker. "If Europe would disarm, and consent to our underwriting their finances as was done with Germany fifteen years ago under the Dawes plan. If she would go into a receiver's hands, so to speak, she could be saved. The resources are there; she has just been living beyond her means. What is in your mind, admiral?"

"I thought we might give her a terrific scare first and then pick her up tenderly and set her on her feet. Suppose we had something gigantic, suppose we found a weapon against which her armies and navies would be powerless—"

"To use an obsolete expression," interrupted the general, "you are talking through your hat. There is no such weapon."

"Are you familiar with the principles of the obsolete game of poker?" asked the admiral softly.

"Obsolete nothing. I played last night," retorted the general.

"Did you bluff?"

There was a roar of laughter.

"I am afraid we can't bluff Europe," said Mr. Merrick sadly. "They know our situation better than we do ourselves."

Admiral Graves pushed back his chair the better to impress his hearers. He was seventy years old, yet his face

was almost boyish. He was clean shaved, and there were few gray hairs in his shock of brown. His eyes were dancing and his smile was contagious. Somehow the circle of despair lost some of its depression before he spoke a word.

"How much money do you fellows represent?" he demanded. "Five billions? Ten billions?"

"Nearer twenty," replied the banker.

"Could you raise a fund of fifty million dollars for an experiment that may save America a hundred billions?"

"Why, yes," said the banker. "Though it is an enormous sum. We would have to see various people."

"This fund must not be advertised. Its existence must not be known."

"I undertake to provide five millions out of my private fortune," said Boswell quietly. "I advise you gentlemen to give until it hurts. We can raise the money in this room, admiral."

"If we know what it's for," qualified Greggson.

"All I can tell you is that it is for the purpose of scaring Europe and her gang of financial conspirators out of their wits," said Graves. "Mr. Merrick, I know the War Department has no money, but you can cloak a great experiment. You can assign army officers to work under the direction of the general and myself."

"Anything of that sort, yes," said Mr. Merrick. "So long as I am not compelled to ask Congress for an appropriation. You know what that means."

"Subscription books are being opened. It's a blind pool, gentlemen. You are insuring yourselves against the war and the loss of everything you possess in this world," said the admiral.

"Fifty millions of dollars for a bluff," said Greggson.

"Give me a sheet of paper," said Mr. Boswell. "Gentlemen, I am absolutely convinced that within one year eastern America will be in the hands of Europe, which means ruin for all of us and catastrophe unimaginable for the United States, not forgetting the loss of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of human lives. Five million dollars, Admiral Graves."

"All I can tell you is that this bluff will cost a terrific amount," said the admiral. "Who's next?"

"Five millions from me," sighed Averill Grant. "It's ten per cent of my fortune, and I can't even take it off my income tax statement."

"A year from now, unless this bluff works," Graves replied, "you will not have to fill out an income tax statement."

Twenty million dollars were subscribed in that room, and each of the subscribers promised to secure enough to make up the balance within a few days.

"Can you give us an inkling of this alleged weapon?" asked Greggson, who had subscribed with more reluctance than the others.

"When the Allied Expedition is in mid-Atlantic," replied the admiral, "the ships of the air, of the surface, and those beneath the sea will be obliterated. Will that be satisfactory?"

A laugh was his answer. "At our next meeting you may have the details," added Admiral Graves. "You come with me, general, I want to talk things over with you."

CHAPTER X.

THE POLICE STATION SCANDAL.

THE police station revel shocked London. In the distressing state of the country, with starving hordes in all the big cities, with business almost at a standstill, with labor militant, and anti-Americanism rampant, the party given by Dick Boswell and Roger Tuttle in a station house

was considered a horrible example of American impudence and parvenu contempt for law.

Although wilder and more expensive festivities had occurred that same night in London, they lacked the picturesque character of the orgy in the drab purlieu of the police station. It happened that the police department had sold the building and it had been rented for the evening for less than the cost of a private ballroom in a big hotel.

That did not figure in the outburst of public indignation. Questions were asked in parliament about it, suggestions were made in sensational newspapers that the perpetrators be put in jail, or at least that the insolent Yankee be deported.

Renée Prévost's press agent seized upon the incident to exploit his star and to couple her name with that of Dick Boswell; and Dick, himself, writhed under his disgrace. Yet it had been a mild affair. Two score guests had attended the party, were playfully locked in cells and then released to dance upon the main floor of the cell house.

An orchestra uniformed as policemen had played, waiters dressed as policemen had served. Several vaudeville comedians had appeared as drunkards and sneak thieves, and an impromptu mock trial was held in which Renée Prévost was the judge, a dozen actresses the jury, and the prisoner, Roger Tuttle, was sentenced to marry the bouncing blond chorus girl whom he had escorted to the party.

There had been much gayety and no drunkenness, and it was all over at two in the morning, yet the sensitive British public was boiling with indignation.

The following afternoon Dick was called upon by a man from Scotland Yard, a very polite but determined person with cold gray eyes and a mouth like a steel trap.

"I have been requested to inform you, sir," he said, "that the police department will not tolerate any more pranks like that of last night."

"We violated no law," protested Dick.

"It isn't that, sir. You have violated good taste. The way things are, with this country on the verge of starvation, no wealthy American ought to come to London and flaunt his dollars in our faces. You're lucky that you are not about to be escorted to a liner for America. We have the right to put anybody out of England who is objectionable, whether they have violated the law or not."

"Indeed. I would suppose you would consider it a good thing to have an American here spending his money freely. I gave work to a score of Englishmen last night and purchased a lot of English food and drink."

"The fact is that we don't like Yankees in London any more," replied the detective. "If you had given your party in a regular manner it would not have been noticed, but you reflected upon the police, and the newspapers have made a fuss about it. I may say, sir, that only the intervention of a very important person saved you this time from deportation."

"May I ask who intervened in my behalf?"

"I'm told, sir, it was Sir Augustus Tuttle, himself. Your particular crony is his son. I assume that was the reason."

"That was very nice of Sir Augustus," said Dick.

"Furthermore," continued the detective, "you are advised to lie low for a few days. If you are pointed out and recognized in a public place it may go hard with you, sir. The people are very resentful. No American can come over here and flout our British institutions with impunity."

Dick grinned. "I'm much obliged I'm sure. Are they likely to tear to pieces my companion in crime, Roger Tuttle?"

"Certainly not, sir. He's not an

American." The man smiled. "I fancy his respected father will attend to him."

After the Scotland Yard representative had taken a cigar and a drink and his departure, Dick had a chance to reflect upon his situation He had followed the instructions of his chief in attracting the attention of Renée Prévost, and so successfully that the French girl gave indications of becoming a pest.

She had already phoned him twice that day, and was coming to dinner with him that night. As he had been advised to stay in his rooms the dinner would have to be served there.

It seemed to him that he had not helped his mission in England by his progress in the esteem of La Prévost. Sir Augustus had already sentenced Roger to Winstut Abbey, and must feel considerable animosity toward the American who had dragged his only son into the limelight.

It meant the closing of the Abbey to Dick when he was expected to establish himself there upon a very familiar footing.

He could not understand why Sir Augustus had prevented his deportation. Believing Dick a bad influence for Roger, he should have welcomed a chance to get him out of the country.

While he would have regretted being sent back to America because it would end his usefulness to the service of which he was a member, if it happened as a result of his obeying orders and through no fault of his own, he would be glad to drop his idiot's mask and become a useful member of society again.

So far as he could see he would be of little use anyway. According to the man named "Brown," a descent upon the United States by Europe, become predatory, was inevitable; and most certainly could not be prevented by a few unofficial American spies abroad; so the thing to do was to go home and learn how to use a rifle.

Why had Sir Augustus, the arch enemy of America, held his hand? Dick could not figure it out.

Sir Augustus, in truth, had been wild with indignation when he learned of the latest escapade of Roger and Dick. He had summoned his son and figuratively flayed him alive, and finally he ordered him to take the next train to Winstut; then he had used his influence to keep Roger's share in the affair out of the newspapers. It was a conversation with his editor in chief, Ernest Goring, that caused him to rescue Dick Boswell.

"Don't deport the fellow," said Goring quietly. "He is valuable to us."

"In what way?" demanded the magnate.

"We are working upon the public mind to hate the United States. We are telling our people they have ruined England, destroyed business, and are looting our treasury and spending our British money in riotous dissipation. This chap Boswell, not a bad fellow by the way, I met him at your house recently. Boswell, I may say, is our 'horrible example.'

"He is a concrete illustration of what we are preaching. This harmless party has infuriated London. My reporter tells me it was really a mild and not very extravagant affair, but it has inflamed popular imagination. He should be encouraged in his mad career. Why, every newspaper in England, with one or two exceptions, has already excoriated him and through him America. To use an Americanism, 'we need him in our business.'"

Sir Augustus burst into a loud guffaw. "By Jove, Goring, you are quite right. He is the picture which illustrates our story, and we must not lose him. The lad is a treasure. I'll put a stop to the deportation business."

And that is how it happened that the man whom Dick supposed to be most indignant with him, saved him from the ignominy of being sent home from England as an undesirable alien.

Renée Prévost, upon close acquaintance, failed to fascinate Dick. The woman was cold and hard and blatantly mercenary. She made love to him brazenly and asked him to pay her bills. She told him of a diamond bracelet she had seen and desired that afternoon. Her complete absence of virtue disgusted him. Fortunately she had to leave early to go to the theater.

He remained in his rooms next morning, awaiting some word from the mysterious Mr. Brown. None came, which indicated that Brown was contented with his behavior, but, in the afternoon, bored almost to extinction, he decided to venture out. He left the hotel, crossed Trafalgar Square, and was looking aimlessly in a shop window when he heard an excited cockney voice crying:

"That's 'im. That's the bleedin' Yankee that gave the party in the police station."

Dick swung about, and to his astonishment recognized in the little man with the brown mustache, who was pointing to him and shouting, none other than his fellow spy, his chief, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown had grasped a costermonger, who was standing beside his barrow, by the shoulder, and the sidewalk merchant followed the direction of his finger and emitted a snarl. In a louder tone Mr. Brown called attention to the blood-sucking American, and a fat woman with a long trailing black skirt, lifted it, displaying men's boots, grasped an umbrella firmly by the middle and stepped close to Boswell.

"Lemme 'ave a look at ye," she implored. "It's the likes of ye wots tyking the bread out o' the mouths of children."

In less than five seconds a dozen persons, not all of them of the lowest class, were staring at Dick or expressing their opinion of him with true British candor. Loudest of all was the scoundrel Brown.

Now the English people are essentially law abiding and not given to carrying concealed weapons. But the gathering throng began to alarm Dick, who thought discretion was the better part of valor, so he began to walk hastily down the Strand away from the crowd.

The crowd followed, however, lifting its voice and informing the world what ought to be done to him, augmented now with every step, until there were a hundred in the pack and hundreds hastening from all directions.

He quickened his step. Small boys ran in front of him, unaware of his crime, but eager to bait him, and he chanced to pass a place where a building was in process of erection. Where a building is going up there are always piles of bricks, and a mischievous gamin lifted half a brick, hefted it and tossed it tentatively along the sidewalk toward the victim of the demonstration.

The idea appealed. Several men grasped whole bricks and threw them with intent to maim. One of them struck Dick in the leg, a glancing blow which forced him to hop on one foot, another zoomed by his head, missing it by a couple of inches. The howls of the mob were drawing policemen.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Fifteen Minutes of Fate

A fatal quicksand stood between him and the train which was hurrying his brother toward death

By
FRANK DORRANCE HOPLEY

"GRANDFATHER, come here quick!"

Bob Fraser turned expectantly toward the cabin. As his summons was not immediately answered, with one bound he flung his one hundred and sixty pounds of blond youth toward the door, shouldered it open, and strode into the little kitchen, where an old man, in blue jumper and overalls, was busy lighting a fire.

"Come out back, quick," Bob shouted. "I've something to show you." Then, as the oldster did not move swiftly enough to suit him, Bob took his grandfather by the arm and dragged him through the cabin and out of the door.

"Look!" he commanded, putting a pair of binoculars in the old man's hand. "Look across to the other side of the bogland and tell me if you see the same thing that I do."

Grandfather put the glasses to his eyes and fumbled with them for several moments before he got the range.

"Well," said Bob impatiently, "what do you see?"

"Looks like there's a big yellow streak in the hill that wasn't there last night," said the elder Fraser, as he adjusted the glasses once more. "I can't just make out what—"

"Of course! Don't you see? It's a landslide," interrupted Bob excitedly. "That big hill has caved in and spread over the road. It's lucky that it happened so early in the morning, when nobody was passing."

Then, as the old man still stood with the glasses glued to his eyes, Bob rattled on:

"We'd better get breakfast started. Roger's train is pretty near due. If he gets a car at the station, it won't take him long to make that three miles. Then for vacation, and fun, and—Why, grandfather, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

The glasses dropped to the ground unheeded. Grandfather Fraser's face was white, and the veins showed queerly underneath the wrinkled skin. He gripped Bob's arm so fiercely that he made him wince.

"That there, across the marsh, isn't the auto road; it's the railroad," the old man shouted. "The train's due in about fifteen minutes. Your brother is on it. The slide has covered the tracks, and the train will be wrecked. We can't stop it, and Roger—"

For just a moment a look of terror came into Bob Fraser's face; then one of grim determination as he shook his arm free.

"We've got to stop it," he said excitedly. "Where's the phone?"

"Isn't any. Don't generally have one in summer shacks like this."

"It's three miles to the station," went on Bob rapidly, thinking out aloud. "Couldn't get there in time. And it must be four miles around to the track the other way. Can't make that either. If we had an airplane it would be easy, but we haven't. Grandfather, I've got to go across the bog. There's no other way."

The face of Grandfather Fraser grew pale. He staggered slightly as he caught hold of Bob's shoulder.

"You can't go across the marsh, Bob. You'd never get through. You'd sink."

"I must!"

Bob had thrown off his coat and was tightening his belt.

"It can't be done." The old man spoke fiercely. "That marsh is almost a quicksand. There are water holes in it ten feet deep. You can't tell where they are. If you don't fall into one of them, the bog would hold you fast, and you'd finally sink. Nobody has ever crossed that half mile of marshland—except—"

"Except who? Did anybody ever do it?"

"A couple of years ago a camper, who was an engineer, thought he could make a path across. He put in a lot of railroad ties and rocks, and managed to get over.

"He didn't try to come back that way, though; said it was too dangerous—the ties shifted so. You can't see any of them nor the stones now. They went down little by little. There's nothing but that row of blue lilies that seem to have grown up along where the ties were."

Bob straightened. There was a look in his clear eyes that made the old man think of the boy's father.

"I'm going, grandfather; you can't stop me. I'll follow the blue lily line. Maybe it will show me the way. I've got a lot to live for, but I wouldn't want to, if Roger went to his death because I was afraid.

"You say there's fifteen minutes before the train will come along, if it's on time. I ought to have time to make it. Good-by, grandfather, until—"

II.

Bob Fraser grasped the old man's hand, then raced down the hill. In a minute he had reached the edge of the bog. Its slimy surface glistened in the sun and seemed to mock at him with its brightness. Running out into the swamp, in irregular lines, were rows of blue lilies, the fleur-de-lis, whose heads bobbed and nodded in the freshening wind.

He would follow the line of the lilies. There was no other guide. Would they pilot him safely, he wondered? There was small chance of his getting across, his common sense told him, yet in his

heart there was a conviction that he could do it. There was no other way to save Roger.

If he failed—Bob drew his breath in sharply—the family of Fraser would be wiped out, except for their old grandfather.

A glance at his wrist watch showed the time: eight five.

At his feet was a stick, a part of a branch of a tree that had been broken off in a recent storm. He picked it up and without hesitation started to cross the marsh.

At his first step into the bog he went in over his shoe tops. Then he tried again and again, with the same result. At last he managed to find a footing, but it was at best, slippery and uncertain.

Slowly, very slowly, he went on, feeling his way with the stick. Step by step he persevered, following as closely as possible the rows of fleur-de-lis that reached out over the marsh, sometimes in a straight line, but often in zigzag turns, making a split trail which confused him.

So great was Bob's eagerness to get to the other side, if it was so fated, that he wanted to rush forward, to run, no matter what the difficulty and danger might be. But he resisted the temptation. Each piece of turf and stone he tested before he let his weight upon it. On and on he went, until, at last, he had reached the middle of the swamp.

From far away, yet distinct in the clear morning air, came the whistle of a locomotive. Eight ten!

All around him was the green, slimy water of the bog. In the bright sunlight of that summer day it gleamed and danced before his eyes. Because of his overwrought condition, a kind of semimadness that had suddenly seized him on account of his fear that he might be too late, weird pictures came before Bob Fraser's eyes.

A thousand faces seemed to be leering at him from below. A thousand hands beckoned to him and reached out their fingers to drag him down. Gaunt, terrible fingers they seemed to him, devil hands that wanted his life and that of his brother Roger.

He stopped. His head was in a whirl. A haze came before his eyes. He reached out gropingly, bewildered, in despair. As he started on, one foot slipped, he lost his balance, tried to get a footing, but failed, and floundered into the clinging mire of the marsh.

Again came that whistle. This time nearer and more distinct.

Eight eleven!

In that moment despair clutched Bob Fraser's heart. He had tried to save Roger, but had seemingly failed. He felt that his strength was not sufficient to carry on the fight against those hands that were reaching for him. They would get him in the end, he felt quite sure. He would go down, down.

There surged over him a great desire to live. How young he was to die! Fifteen minutes before, death had not entered his mind. He had thought of nothing but life.

There was to be a jolly vacation with his brother Roger and his grandfather at the bungalow on the hilltop. But that seemed ages ago, as he looked at the slimy, murky water of the bog.

A little bird flew out and lighted on a reed near by. It cocked its head and looked at Bob in surprise, then broke into song. But a dash of water from the struggling Bob hit the reed; the bird stopped singing suddenly and darted away.

There was something in that bird's song, however, that gave Bob heart again. He must make another effort. He would go down, if need be, but go down fighting. The blood of the Puritan Frasers was in his veins. The grim determination that for a century had been a characteristic of his New England ancestors had always been a part of his make-up. Now that it was needed, it did not forsake him.

Eight twelve!

Bob struggled fiercely and struck out with his stick. It snapped in the middle. Farther and farther he sagged into the bog. He could feel the cold, murky water seeping in through his clothes. It chilled him.

A cloud went over the sun. The leering faces below grew dark and sullen. He reached out with what was left of the pole and felt carefully. It slipped, and once more he stumbled.

The stick broke off short in his hand and he nearly plunged headlong into the mire.

That whistle again. Louder and nearer than before!

Then Bob Fraser suddenly realized two things that almost caused his heart to stop beating. The line of blue lilies had disappeared; nothing but rank growths of grass greeted his eyes. Pools of bluish-green water were everywhere in the fifty feet that separated him from the opposite bank. That was all. No lily pads even, to show where the flowers had been.

Was the path, if there was one, straight or zigzag? He could not tell. The fleur-de-lis had forsaken him. There was nothing to guide him now. But he must go on.

Bob tried to take a step, but could not. So deeply had he become embedded in the mire that he could not pull his feet out. What Grandfather Fraser had feared had happened. He was held a prisoner in the clutches of the great green swamp.

Fifty feet away was the bank that meant safety for himself and Roger; but he could not get there.

Then he knew that he was not only held fast, but he was sinking. The mire at first had only been up to his knees; now it was slowly creeping up and up, about two inches a minute, so Bob figured.

He wondered how long it would take before he was entirely out of sight, buried under the cold, dank weeds.

He glanced at his watch. Eight thirteen!

Instinctively Bob turned and looked at the bungalow on the hill, now so far away. He wondered if his grandfather knew of his plight, if he was still watching. He could not distinguish the old man at the distance.

The sun came out again, and Bob caught a glint of light from the hilltop. A gleam of sunlight reflected from the glass of the binoculars. Yes, Grandfather Fraser was still watching.

Bob wondered if he would keep watching until he, Bob, had entirely disappeared, whether he would look when the train crashed into the landslide, with Roger on board.

Eight fourteen!

One minute more and the train would be due. In sixty short seconds it would come rushing to its fate, a catastrophe that he could not avert.

During those fateful fifteen minutes, which seemed to him like ages, Bob Fraser had experienced more emotions than come to most people during a lifetime. The strain had been tremendous. He was cracking under it, but he must make one last try.

He put his hands on his hips and tensed his muscles, endeavoring to wrench his feet free. So great was the effort that it seemed to Bob that the cords of his legs must surely be able to pull his feet out of the clinging mire.

But the great green swamp was stronger than he. It held him fast. The only result of his struggles was that he settled deeper into the bog.

Eight fifteen!

III.

From far up the track came the raucous whistle of the locomotive. Bob could see the spiral of steam, then the flash of the sun upon its headlight as it settled into a straightaway run. He put his fingers in his ears and turned his head the other way.

He did not want to see or hear the crash of the train when it hit the landslide, with all those people on board, and Roger—

But he could not shut out entirely the noise of the oncoming train. There was shriek after shriek of the whistle, strident and penetrating, a grinding screech as the brakes went on, a rattle and clatter as the train slowed down.

Bob could distinguish the shouts and cries of the excited passengers as they swarmed out of the cars. Then he realized that they were running down the bank, shouting and calling.

Why, they were calling to him! He turned his head and looked.

Men, dozens of them, were making their way down the slippery bank. They were shouting to him to have courage.

One man brought a rope, and sent it hurtling out into the marsh. It was Roger! But it fell short. Then Roger tried again, and this time the rope stopped just beyond Bob's reach. He tried to get it, nearly fell headlong, and sank a little lower into the marsh. Then Bob caught the rope and began to wind it around his body and over his shoulders. When he had tied it tightly, the men on the bank began to pull.

It seemed to Bob Fraser that he was being torn apart. At first his feet refused to move; the mud held them fast. He cried out in his agony, and the men stopped pulling. Then they tried again, and one leg came free; then the other.

After that it was easy. They pulled him up on the bank, very tired, very bedraggled, but very happy.

It was Roger who first reached him, Roger's hands which quickly untied the rope from the tired body. Roger's shoulder against which he leaned until he got his breath.

As he looked up into the face of his brother, with the passengers crowding around him, Bob Fraser smiled wanly.

"I came to meet you, Roger, but I was detained," he said whimsically. "Nothing matters now, though, that you are safe."

The eyes of Roger Fraser were wet as he grasped his brother's hand.

"You saved us, Bob," he said, "all our lives, even if you didn't get across in time. The engineer saw you struggling in the bog and stopped the train to help you. That saved the train.

"If it hadn't stopped when it did it would have crashed into the landslide; because of the curve there he couldn't see it until the train had slowed up. Now we must get up to the shack, Bob, as soon as we can get a car. You're nearly done for."

"I wonder," said Bob as he looked out across the bog to the hilltop on the other side, "if grandfather saw it all. I wonder if he is still watching."

But Grandfather Fraser was not looking any longer. He had seen enough. A shaft of blue smoke from the bungalow chimney, almost as blue as the line of lilies in the marsh, told the story. He was preparing a much-belated breakfast for his two boys—who had saved each other.

THE END

Wild Horse Industry

WILD horses still infest the West, and prove a pest to ranchers. In Wyoming a packing plant has been opened for the purpose of packing the horses for export to foreign countries, where the domestic aversion for horse meat is not prevalent.

In addition there is revenue derived from the hides, and bones are converted into fertilizer. Such horses are rounded up in wholesale numbers, and are then sold to the packing plant for from one to five dollars each.

Harold J. Ashe.

Now We're Rich

Every one wants money and imagines what he'd do with it. Do you think you would act like this husband or the wife or the children?

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN old Prindle was dying, because he liked Henry Morrow, he sold Henry his ancient house for the exact cash Henry possessed, which was a remarkable bargain. His whole married life Henry had struggled along with his small exporting business; and his young looking wife Laura, his sensible eldest daughter Ina, his modern William and Margery, had been as comfortable as most in Wellmont, Long Island, and with the usual complaints. In an old wall safe in the new home they found shares of Manikoma oil stock, the sensation of the market; their shares having passed a one hundred thousand dollar value and still rising. Although Henry disappointed them by refusing to use it until he was sure of his right, a subtle change took place. Laura was bitten by the society bug, his children started a mad pace, and Henry's home life was disrupted. In desperation, he moved into new and expensive offices, ordered new equipment, and supplied Jim Brantree, his brother-in-law, with money to have investigated the financial defection in the Salton Company with which Brantree was accused and

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 16

threatened with criminal trial. As yet the stock was untouched. The climax was reached for Henry when, arriving home, he found no Laura and no message. He was calling the police station when he heard a car stop out front.

CHAPTER XII *(Continued).*

THE DOWNWARD PATH.

IMMEDIATELY, however, Henry's stopped heart resumed. They were not bringing Laura home in quite the way he had thought at first. Women, at any rate, were laughing out there, as they would hardly have laughed over the mangled, bandaged ruin he had just been imagining. He hurried to the door and opened it as the car rolled away.

Laura was walking up the old flagged path. But she wasn't walking in exactly the usual manner, as Henry's quick eye noted. She was approaching with a suggestion of dance step! Henry frowned wonderingly; she was also humming quite loudly, which might have meant nothing in another woman, but which was astounding when done in the open street by circumspect Laura.

"Oh, hello, Harry," Laura said quite jauntily as she entered.

"Er—hello!" Henry muttered. "Where have you been?"

"Out!" Laura said, with a gay little laugh, and passed him. Henry stood petrified, nostrils wide, sniffing, sniffing! Then, scowling incredulously, he followed Laura.

"Hello, moms," William cried. "You all right?"

"Of course I am," laughed Laura. Now she glanced toward the kitchen door, where Ina stood steamily involved in dinner; and of this most important rite in the whole day's program Laura spoke with an indifference no less than impossible: "Getting on nicely, Ina?"

"Oh, hello, mother. Yes, mother. These potatoes—"

"That's good," said Laura, and turned away. "Where's Marge?"

Henry Morrow laid an extremely firm hand upon his wife's arm—a hand that had turned to ice.

"She is taking a nap, Laura. You come upstairs with me," he said. "You want to get off your things."

Laura looked up with an inquiring half smile—but she was moving along upstairs beside him, and Henry's fingers tightened and his breath came hard. One glance showed that Margey really was curled up and sound asleep. Henry led his wife to their own room, mercifully at the other end of the house, and closed the door softly.

"I—I want to smell your breath!" he forced out.

"My—what? I drank two cocktails, if that's what you mean?"

Henry just missed reeling!

"Where?"

"At the Country Club, of course. Mrs. Burgess took me out there for their tea dance. But please don't—"

"And I'd thought you'd been hurt!" Henry cried. "I thought something had happened to you and I—I was just going to call up the police and find out whether—say! I'm going to get the doctor and have you pumped out, and —no! this'll do as well!" Henry panted and gripped her again and dragged her across to the basin, where he started the tap. "You come here with me!"

"Don't—don't haul me around like that, Harry! Don't—"

"You stick your head in that cold water!" Henry trembled. "If you don't, believe me, I'll stick it in for you!"

It was distinctly cold, too; Wellmont's supply is drawn from the mountains. Presently Laura was permitted to emerge, gasping, sputtering, tottering under the hands behind the bath towel that was being rubbed over her bobbed head. She was startled; she

seemed somewhat displeased; but she was also amused and perhaps her eyes were clearer. Henry sat her down with a brutal thud and stood over her.

"Now, then! Out with it! How much more stuff did you guzzle?"

Laura blinked at him and reached for the dry end of the towel.

"I've told you—two cocktails. All the women were drinking them and—and they were awful, Harry. I still feel as if I'd swallowed a cupful of chain lightning!"

"And the next time it will be three and the next time four and—"

"There isn't going to be any next time," Laura sighed. "I don't like that sort of thing well enough. Oh, the club itself—yes, the club's just wonderful. But not the liquor; there wouldn't have been any this time if I hadn't watched Mrs. Harrison drink about a quart of the mess, Hal. It had no effect on her at all."

Henry folded his arms and studied her with somber eyes. If ever the time had come to point a lesson, this was the time.

"No wonder the kids were wild!"

"With a mother like me?"

"With a mother like you!"

"Well, that's plain ridiculous!" Laura said warmly. "We've been buried a long time, Harry, and I like people, and if I can see something of them, I mean to. But I assure you that I didn't come home this time blind drunk, if that's what the tragic pose is meant to indicate, and I assure you that I'll be a total abstainer hereafter. That's a promise, if you want one. I'm not a bad moral influence on the children, though."

"I—I didn't say just that!" Henry stammered. "I said—why, Laura, I don't see how you *could* do a thing like that!"

"Was it any more ridiculous than being drowned by main force in a wash basin?" Laura demanded.

"Well—well, maybe it wasn't. Maybe I got excited when I caught that breath and—say! you're not going to be able to go down for dinner, are you?"

Laura laughed helplessly.

"Yes, you poor old ninny, I'll be down for dinner as soon as my hair is dry," she said. "Will you please give me another Turkish towel from the closet—the big drawer? And you might start the electric fan. I'll not be long.

"And when you go down, tell Ina to mash the potatoes and heat the pot-roast. The gravy is on the bottom shelf of the icebox, in a blue bowl, toward the back."

Well, at least she was herself again! Henry left her and, for the benefit of his menaced, innocent children, forced a smile of terrible calm as he descended. But the shock had been terrific; the shock had rocked him and racked him, and it was still doing both. Other women, like Mrs. Harrison—yes, naturally; they were that sort of women. But Laura!

Even when he went to bed, he had by no means recovered from the shock. His physical cranium no longer shook visibly, but his mental head, so to speak, wagged at regular intervals; he couldn't understand it, and he couldn't seem to get over it, and he couldn't sleep, although Laura seemed to be sleeping restlessly.

Long after two, when William had returned to the parental roof and settled down for the night, Henry did drowse off; but he woke again with a start, to find Laura's arm about his neck and Laura crying on his shoulder.

"I don't mean to be such a beastly idiot, Hal!" Laura sobbed softly. "I'm so ashamed of myself!"

Henry cuddled her close to him and heaved a great sigh; half asleep as he was, he could still recognize true repentance.

"Well, don't do it again, kid!" he mumbled. "Don't you ever do anything like that again!"

After that he slumbered deeply.

Past three Laura stifled an unexpected, spasmodic little giggle and went to sleep herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

RAMIFICATIONS.

APART from the shame of the thing itself, Laura had cause to regret her little slip.

There was a certain matter she wished to offer, in the most tactful and diplomatic way, for Henry's attention. She had thought to bring it up that evening—but it had turned into rather an unpropitious evening for such matters. All the way out to the Country Club Laura had been framing pretty little thoughts and shaping to fit them divers pretty little phrases, each entirely disarming and innocuous at first hearing; each, as one might discover on careful analysis, rather filled with significance.

Arrived at the club, Laura had been clear on her proposed plan of approach and rather proud of her job; and then she must needs be led astray by a silver cocktail shaker! However, there was time.

Two evenings after her downfall, the air cleared with the returning Henry's humorous: "Hello, honey! Sober to-night? That's good." He remained in consistently good humor after dinner, too; somebody's check for two hundred and seventy odd dollars had arrived in the office mail, reminding Henry, as he said, that he was still in business.

"Oh, Harry," Laura murmured, when Brantree had gone upstairs to his uneasy bed.

"Umum?"

"I think I'd like to give a party."

Henry dropped his paper.

"What kind of a party?"

"It would have to be a little one, wouldn't it?"

"You bet it would, around these diggings just now!" Morrow said firmly. "A sort of vest pocket party, with ice water for refreshments. What are we paying for ice now, by the way?"

"I—I don't know. Why?"

"Saw a wagon down by the station when I came home to-night, with a sign on it: 'Fifty Cents per Hundred Pounds.' Struck me that was pretty cheap. I jotted down the telephone number; it's up in my wallet."

Laura looked wistful.

"It wouldn't really have to be as simple as all that?"

"No?" There was something in her tone that caused Henry to prick up his ears. "See here, my child," he said mildly, "you're not thinking of having Couveau furnish a supper and send up a crowd of Greek waiters to serve it, are you?"

"Good gracious, no!" Laura cried.

"Because it seems to me you've been getting some pretty high-hat ideas since we moved in here and—"

"Oh, dear no! We'll get some ice cream from Couveau, of course; he has the prettiest little new molds, too. All the rest of it Ina and I can attend to—it will really amount to little or nothing," said Laura, with a shrug which seemed to indicate, at the very most, a small tin of potted ham for sandwiches and whatever odds and ends happened to be in the icebox on the night of the affair.

Henry rubbed his chin.

"That's my idea of a party, just about now," he reflected. "Little or nothing—preferably nothing. When do you want to do all this?"

"I thought perhaps Thursday night. You've nothing on then?"

"I've nothing on any night; you ought to know that. Except week after next, of course; I want to go down to the lodge for that shindig."

"Thursday, then," said Laura. "I'm sure that will be all right. I mean, it isn't as if I had to get out invitations weeks in advance for a little party like this."

"No—no. Only one thing, Laura."

"Yes, dear?"

"You're not going to get a big gang of people in, are you?" Morrow inquired, with a painful smile.

"I don't know a big gang, Harry."

"No, but I mean—formal?" Henry said, vaguely. "I don't have to dress up for this thing?"

"Well, of course not!" Laura laughed. "I tell you, it isn't done, up here in Wellmont—no, not even among the really wealthy people, Harry. And, darling, please don't look so downcast. This is to be just a merry little gathering—at least, I hope it is—and not a funeral."

"Yes, Laura, but when a man comes home tired—"

"I know," Laura laughed again. "A lot of the men seem to feel very much the same way, Harry. Mrs. Harrison says that once in awhile, when she has friends in, her husband takes his pipe and a pile of magazines and goes up and locks himself in the storeroom."

"Aha?" said Henry, nodding understandingly. "That bird's brighter than I thought he was."

And again Laura laughed and allowed the whole subject to drift gently away; and Henry Morrow returned to his newspaper, felt about for his pencil and decided to do the crossword puzzle on the last page.

Obviously, nothing could have been less ominous in prospect than this party of Laura's. Half a dozen people whom he probably detested, but could certainly endure for one evening—bale of sandwiches—coffee served from Grandma Morrow's big old solid silver urn—all the dishes in the world to be washed afterward. Why not? Now then, a four-letter word meaning "expired."

Wednesday started badly.

Jones, of the furniture, was waiting when Henry Morrow reached his office. Jones's professional smile beamed brightly as ever, but there was a hard little glint in his eye when he followed Henry into the private office.

"Well, well, out collecting again, you see!" he said.

"Won't do you much good around here," Henry stated, as he put his hat in the closet.

Mr. Jones carried no sheaf this morning; his nicely manicured fingers held just one bill—Henry's bill.

"You wouldn't care to give me a check for this to-day, Mr. Morrow?" he smiled, quite seductively.

"I would not."

"Well, I wish—"

"Wait a minute before you tell me what you wish!" Henry snapped. "I've said it before and I'm saying it now for the last time: when I bought this stuff you told me specifically that I could take two months to pay, if I liked, and—"

"I'm afraid I did that on my own responsibility, sir," the other interrupted.

"Does that mean something?"

"Well—er—you see, the boss has marked this one for collection now."

"*Why?*"

"My dear Mr. Morrow, *I* don't know!" Jones laughed.

"Well, I want to know. Call him up and find out!"

"Er—Mr. Bantick's not at the store this morning, sir," Jones said soothingly. "And please don't be offended, Mr. Morrow. You see—"

"I'm not!" Henry snapped. "I'm bored stiff, seeing you run in every other day with that bill. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before, in all the years I've been in business. What's the idea of it? Are you afraid I'm going to sell this junk and leave town?"

Mr. Jones said nothing.

"Pretty soon, you know," Henry added, "I'll get a truck and have the whole damned collection dumped on your sidewalk!"

Mr. Jones laughed heartily at this quaint conceit.

"Well, let me make some sort of memo on this account, sir?" he sug-

gested. "Just give me a date—a tentative date, you know—when we can expect your check?"

"Put down any date you like," Henry grunted, and turned to his desk. "You'll get your check within sixty days, just as I agreed in the first place."

But his righteous rage departed before the door had clicked after Jones. He gripped the arms of his chair and scowled at the shining expanse of mahogany before him. This was getting to be too much of a good thing, you know! What did it mean, anyway?

Had some one been telling the fool furniture firm what a very small business man Henry Morrow really was? They'd have done well to add that, up to date, nobody had as yet lost a dollar through the same Henry.

Although for a concern of just this caliber, fourteen hundred dollars' worth of office fittings certainly was a lot to be taking on all at once; he admitted that. The spell of Manikoma Oil had been upon him that day; perhaps he had turned slightly insane when wandering over the sample floor among all those fancy contraptions?

Henry's scowl grew blacker. If Manikoma Oil had got him into this, Manikoma Oil might get him out of it. He'd be hanged if he'd have that fellow running in and dunning him every few minutes! He'd take one chance, which is not much in a whole lifetime, and sell a few shares of Manikoma today and clean up the bill and—well, devil take the hindmost!

He rose with determination.

He sat down again, for Charlie Easton was entering with a ledger, some papers and a puzzled expression. Henry was much cooler when a number of details had been painstakingly explained to Charlie Easton; but the worry of the thing remained with him. Yes, sir, try as he would to push that infernal bill out of his mind, it came back every time and nagged him like a toothache!

They had news for him at home that night. Brantree broke his just after Henry returned home.

"Peter Salton called up!" he whispered shakily.

"Eh?"

"Just now. I just hung up."

"What 'd he have to say?" Henry inquired.

"He can't stall his brother any longer, Hank," Brantree said with a quick, terrified little smile. "He says the old man cut loose to-day and swore he'd have me pinched to-morrow! He told me to beat it now, while I still had a chance. What do you think?"

"How much money have you?"

"Not ten dollars."

"Don't beat it, Jim," Henry said grimly. "You can't go far on that, and I can't lend you enough to get you much farther. Wherever you landed, you'd have to hunt a job, and if you hadn't starved to death by the time you found it, they'd have caught up with you. Stay where you are."

"Yes, but if—if—well, Laura, with this party coming to-morrow—I don't know!" the unfortunate person muttered, and laughed his hollow laugh. "Lord! I think I've lost my nerve at last, Henry! I haven't been able to eat much for a week and I haven't slept a wink in three nights. I'm shot to pieces. I don't know what to do!"

"Isn't your friend Gallivan getting any results?"

"Apparently not, Hank. I called up this afternoon."

"Then maybe—psst!" said Henry. "Here comes Laura."

Laura drew her husband aside after a dinner which had lacked the light of William's smile. William, so his friend Pete Henderson had phoned, was dining at the Henderson home this evening, with Joy and several more rare young spirits.

"Harry, this is Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Unless they have the date line wrong on the papers," Henry grinned.

"Yes, I shouldn't have left it until

so late," Laura mused. "Er—Harry, we'll have to have something to drink for my party."

"Eh? Coffee?"

"Well, some of them like something stronger than coffee," Laura laughed.

"Oh, booze? Well, we've got that elderberry wine Clara made down cellar. There's over a quart of that left."

"I'm afraid they may want something even stronger than elderberry wine."

"Well, what are your friends in the habit of drinking? Sulfuric acid?" Henry asked tartly.

"No. Scotch, most of them."

"I wouldn't know where to get it." Henry said, with some mistaken finality. "So far as I know, I've never even seen a bootlegger."

"I asked Mrs. Harrison," Laura explained. "There's a cigar store just across from the station, on the other side of the tracks. Coffley's—you know the place. You go in there and ask for Sam."

Mr. Morrow stared hard at his wife.

"Say, are you suggesting, with things as they are, that I go and spend good money for fusel oil or wood alcohol, or whatever it is?"

"We'll simply have to have a little something of the kind."

"I fail to see it!" Henry said flatly. "We've run this house for twenty-five years on less than two quarts of booze, and most of that went for colds and so on. If your friends can't sit down and enjoy a good cup of coffee, I'd let 'em—"

"Oh, it isn't that you can't understand! You won't understand!" Laura flared out astonishingly! "That's nothing but a pose, Harry! Nobody could possibly be so stupid and old-fashioned as you've sought to appear lately.

"Perhaps you've tried not to change, but the rest of the world *has* changed, you know. I can't ask these people to wear hoop skirts and play croquet, and I can't offer them nothing but coffee. Why, unless we have a drop or two of something in the house, I can't have my party at all!"

"You mean to say," Henry said blankly, "you *can't?*"

"Not if I ever want to see those people here again, and I do!"

She had drawn herself up, too; she was glaring defiance!

"Well, I'll be—" Henry began; and failed to complete the thought and rose with a savage jerk. "All right, kid! You know best what you want. Shall I go down now and get your hooch?"

"I wish you would, Hal." Laura dimpled. "And don't stop to burn any witches on the way. This isn't really sinful."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said honest Henry. "I never drank, but I'm no reformer. It makes no difference to me if the other fellow wants to soak up a gallon a day—so long as it's not you, Laura. What hurts me just now is having to buy it for him. Bill took the car, of course?"

"He—yes, Hal."

"Very well," Mr. Morrow muttered, and found his hat and light overcoat. "A bottle of—what? What 'll I ask for?"

"Scotch—the best Scotch. But not just one bottle, Harry. I'll want four at least!"

"What for?" Henry gasped. "Are you going to wash 'em in it?"

"Three, then," Laura said.

Mr. Morrow's teeth clicked together grimly. He grunted as he left the house; he muttered quite luridly as he passed down dusky March Avenue. Here, forsooth, was a nice errand for a respectable man! His ideas as to the procedure itself were hazy, but they were not nearly so hazy as to possible consequences.

Every day the papers carried little stories with headlines like: "Volstead Violator Fined Five Hundred Dollars," or "Caught With Liquor, Gets Three Months in Jail."

So now, when he had gone into Cof-

fley's tawdry little store and had asked for Sam and then had been slipped through some secret door or panel into the region of illicit alcoholics and finally had emerged with his bundle, the chances were that the first policeman would pick him up.

Henry laughed bitterly. At that, you know, worse things could happen to one! Once in jail, they have to feed you free of charge!

He glanced around very cautiously and then darted into Coffley's, where an ill-favored young man lolled behind the cigar counter and read a tabloid.

"Er—Same here?" Henry said

"*Sam!*" bawled the young man.

There was a stirring and a thudding in the back room as the legs of a chair came down and in the doorway appeared a large, well dressed man who at one time, Henry recalled, had worn overalls and worked on the express wagon.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Morrow!" he shouted genially. "How they running for you, sir? What 'll it be this evening, Mr. Morrow?"

"Well—ah—have you some good Scotch?"

"Best you can buy, sir. No, it ain't prewar; I don't say that, Mr. Morrow. But this is the real stuff; it's "—he hesitated an instant, studying Henry—"right off the boat, sir. Will I send you up a case, Mr. Morrow? 'Lo, Jack!" he cried, and waved a hand at the passing policeman who had just sent a cold chill down Henry's spine.

"Not—not a case," Henry said in a low, husky voice. "Just a couple of bottles. Make it—ah—three. You're sure this is all right?"

"If I had children I'd let 'em drink it!" Sam said heartily, as he started for the back room; and there was further thumping and a clink of glass and a swishing of paper; and after that Sam handed Henry Morrow a neat package and said beamingly: "Twenty-one bucks!"

"*How much?*" Henry choked.

"Well, Mr. Morrow, that's giving you the stuff! That's making you a present of it, sir!" Sam said reproachfully. "If it wasn't I'd known you so long when you were living down at the old place, that 'd stand you eight fifty a bottle. Oh, that's absolutely on the level, Mr. Morrow. It costs money to get that in nowadays!"

It did. It did, indeed, Henry agreed as he trudged homeward too numbed even to think of possible policemen along the route. The twenty-five dollars on which he had meant to worry along for the rest of the week had dwindled to four!

Well, it was in line with everything else, wasn't it? Not much use blinking at the way things were going, eh? His family was sliding downhill so swiftly that nothing short of a miracle could stop the slide! And after all the humdrum, comfortable years, too, with the kids growing up and Laura singing around the house and making the dollars stretch and Henry muddling along from year to year, never very well satisfied, but never greatly discontented—and most emphatically never worrying about his home!

Now Laura had come home half drunk on one occasion and she was diverting what should have been lunch money into liquor for her friends; and Willie and Marge had gone positively crazy! Why, that boy last night—honestly, actually!—had looked to Henry Morrow as if he was losing his mind.

He had had a feverish light in his eye and a red spot on either cheek and he had enlivened the household at two thirty this morning with a song that seemed mainly "Whoop-de-do!" with variations, until a pertinent word from Henry ended the recital.

As for little Marge—Henry turned chilly, just as he always did these days when he thought of Marge. That kid wasn't going to get out of any high school this spring! That pretty little young one, who laughed in his face

whenever he tried to talk sense into her, was headed for trouble just as surely as he was walking along here with a bundle of whisky bottles!

Where was it all to end? Henry laughed bitterly indeed as he turned up the flagged path to his home. He might be stupid and he might be old-fashioned, but he had seen enough of life to make a very fine guess at that answer.

Very shortly, indeed, unless brains and gold together began to rain into his home, something was going to give way with a loud, conclusive bang! Afterward, perhaps, they'd pick up the pieces and start over again. But he wished to Heaven he'd paid that increase in rent and let it go at that!

"You'll have to go light on the butcher and the grocer for a couple of weeks, Laura," he said. "There's your twenty-one dollars' worth of booze!"

"Good gracious! Is—is that what three bottles cost?" Laura cried.

Aha! A shred of sense left, eh? At least, she was shocked.

"That's what it cost!" Henry said impressively. "And I think—"

"Well, put it in the sideboard, dear, before anything happens to it," Laura smiled. "Where are you going, Jimmy?"

"I think I'll go up and pack," Brantree sighed.

"Well, but you're not—"

"You're not going anywhere, Jim!" Henry protested energetically. "Blast it! Don't you see you *can't?* I haven't—well, you haven't the price to get you anywhere, I mean. And—here, Jim! I'll tell you what! To-morrow morning, first thing, I'll go around and see Wickett & Sobel and tell them all about your case. Wickett's a shrewd devil and he packs a terrible wallop, Jim. He'll probably—"

"He can't do anything for me," Brantree interrupted with his mirthless laugh. "You don't understand, either of you. It's just that I want to get my things together. I don't know, but I imagine they don't give you long to pack when they come for you!"

Slowly he mounted the stairs. Laura glanced at her husband.

"Harry, I do think—"

"Think what?"

"That you might get him out of it. Mr. Prindle isn't coming back, you know."

"He won't let me!"

"It could all be settled before he knew anything about it!"

Henry writhed and nodded.

"That's true. So it could. But—well, listen, Laura. If it does come to a crisis, I'll—er—do something about it. I don't believe it will."

"When you know perfectly well—" Laura began in utter exasperation.

"Yes, honey, I know. I'm dumb. But I have—I don't know, a sort of feeling. Seems to me they'd have arrested him before this if they were going to. But, as I say, if they actually do—"

He hated to see Laura's nostrils dilate like that. It was unflattering when done that way. He opened his paper, started at it, laid it on his knees, sighed:

"Well, anyway, kid, it's good to be home here with you. There's nothing more to happen to-night."

"Has something happened?"

"Not a thing!" Henry said tartly. "Will Willie be home before daylight from this Henderson gathering?"

"I hope so."

"Where's our young lady this evening?"

"Margey? Gone to a—was it a dinner dance?"

"How should I know? I'm not consulted about these things."

"It was a dinner dance. She thought she might be later than usual."

"Before we're done with this," Henry said cheerily, "you're going to be mighty sorry for letting that kid run around like that!"

Laura laid down her embroidery.

"Harry, please! If you twang that

string much longer, it will break. I was talking it over with Mrs. Burtis yesterday. The children are fond of each other—yes. And it doesn't mean a thing. Years from now, they may possibly become engaged.

"It's much more likely each will have forgotten the other ever lived. However, Gerald's going away at the end of this week to a technical school and he'll be there two years, training to take charge of his father's factories. Does that make you any happier?"

"It does not!" the remarkable Morrow cried. "It makes me a darned sight more uneasy. They're a high-pressure pair, those kids, and what may happen when they're facing a two-year separation—what?"

"I think," Laura said, "you're disgusting!"

"That's quite possible. But at the same time—"

Henry picked up his paper, shook it out and hid behind its expanse. Perhaps he was! Perhaps his mind was a mere seething mire of filthy suspicion. And then again, perhaps it was nothing of the sort. So far as actual evidence went—well, no, he had no evidence. Perhaps it would be easier to read this paper if he didn't hold it upside down. Perhaps he didn't want to read it at all!

"I think I'll go up and climb in between the sheets and forget it!" he snapped!

"I'll be up shortly," Laura said.

Henry arose and yawned. Not even a protest, eh? Doubtless he bored this new Laura. Surely her expression indicated something of the kind. Well, he had never bored her in the good old days and he had no intention of beginning now. He grunted and tossed his paper to the table and then he paused and scowled, for a car had just rolled up the drive beside the house and stopped.

"Dog-gone it!" snarled Henry Morrow. "Company! And I wanted to go to bed!"

"That sounded like our engine, Harry."

"It *is* our engine," Henry agreed, as the motor died with a too familiar clanking. "Willie has come back for something."

Drearily enough, he waited for William to appear; and William did appear within the half-minute and abruptly Henry straightened up and endeavored to smile pleasantly. William was not alone, you see. No indeed! William couldn't leave his little painted friend at Henderson's even long enough to come home and get whatever it was he wanted; he had dragged her along with him!

Although she wasn't quite so heavily smeared with the pigments this evening. Henry stared at her frankly. As a matter of mere justice, she looked almost human when all cleaned and scraped like this. She looked rather pop-eyed and scared, too. Well, so did Bill! Henry stared at Bill.

"Well, hello, folks!" William roared strangely, thickly.

"Hello, son. What's the matter with you?" Henry asked.

"Well—er—well—" William continued gustily; and then he hurled an arm about little Joy and, with a caveman jerk, pulled her close to him. "Well, anyway," William forced out, "*meet the wife!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

FURTHER CONSEQUENCES.

LAURA had risen, smiling the wonderful smile she always had ready for her adored man-child. But now the oddest little yelping gasp escaped Laura and she reeled and clutched the back of a chair and steadied herself as she faltered:

"Why, Willie—why, darling—"

"Meet the *what?*" Henry rasped.

Smiling weirdly, William dragged out a handkerchief and mopped his pallid brow.

"I—I—told you without dropping dead!" he stated. "P-Pete bet me a dol-dollar I—I couldn't."

"Say, what the Sam Hill are you talking about?" Henry demanded. "You two aren't—aren't *married?*"

Laura had whisked forward; Laura ran to her son and shook his arm, which was limp and loose as the arm of a scarecrow.

"Dearest, you're joking, of course?" she managed. "Will, darling, you *are* joking, aren't you?"

"You don't mean to tell me you went and got married?" Henry yelled, for he seemed to have great difficulty in grasping the idea.

William smiled on, seeking the while to stuff the handkerchief into a pocket that was really on the other side of his coat.

"Didn't we, though?" he said. "Show them the paper the nice gentleman gave you, sweetheart! You—you can kiss her, dad!"

"But you can't be married!" Henry cried, quite ignoring the opportunity. "You're not old enough! You—"

"I'll be twenty-one in a couple of months, father," William informed him. "And if you have this one annulled, we'll go to work and get married over again on my birthday. We thought of all that."

"Yes, but—why, you blooming little idiot, what have you got to support a wife on?"

William stiffened.

"I'm not an idiot!" he replied. "Or else you were, too! What did you have when you got married, father?"

"That's an altogether different matter! Times have changed and—why, my soul! I thought you understood that! You said that very thing not long ago yourself."

William's grin reappeared and grew significant.

"I know I did. But times have done some changing since then, too, haven't they, dad?"

"What does that mean?"

William winked mischievously.

"Oh, you know. I guess we'll make out."

Laura was still holding her son's arm. Her lips were not too steady now.

"Darling, whatever—*ever* made you do this?" she asked plaintively.

"Well, mother, why not?" William demanded, with some heat. "You got married, didn't you?"

"Yes, dear, but that—"

"Did anybody yell at you and look at you as if you'd strangled the cat and burned an orphan asylum?"

"We're not doing that, darling," Laura said, and sniffed audibly.

"Yes, you are! I—I don't see why I can't get a break here!"

Laura turned weakly to her husband. Her husband was staring at Joy Morrow, née Harrison, without the slightest visible sign that he meant to run and snatch a parental kiss. Joy shrank against her new husband.

"I didn't do it!" she said hastily. "I thought we ought to wait! Didn't I, Will?"

"You sure did, chicken-licken!" William answered, and drew her to him again. "And I couldn't see that waiting stuff—not now."

"I thought we ought to wait until—until—"

"All right; I'm not accusing you!" Henry said shortly. "Chances are you have more brains than he has, at that. You couldn't have much less."

"Do your people know yet, Joy?" Laura's wan little voice asked.

"Yes, we—we told them a few minutes ago," Joy said, and shuddered. "They may be over a little later. They thought they wouldn't come until we had—had—"

Her voice broke. Laura, impulsively enough and still with no overwhelming love, put her arms about the young woman.

"Well, it's all right; don't cry!" Laura sobbed. "It—*has* to be all right now, I suppose."

William Morrow nodded composedly.

"I told you my ma was a sport, kid!" he observed.

"Well, your father's not!" Henry snapped. "Come into the kitchen with me for a minute. I want to talk to you!"

"Say, you don't think you're going to give me a licking, do you?" William cried.

"I do not!" Morrow said sourly. "Those you've had were just that much wasted energy."

William followed him almost languidly. Henry closed the kitchen door and perched on the edge of the table.

"Now, then! What did the wink mean?" he inquired.

"Just now?"

"Just a few minutes ago, when you guessed you'd make out."

"Well, dad, coming right down to cases—man to man, you know," William laughed, "you wouldn't let me starve, would you?"

"Not if I could help it, I suppose. Did it ever occur to you, though, that I may not be able to support another family?"

"I'm not going to ask you to support me! That isn't it at all. I got a raise to thirty a week, yesterday. We can make out on that. But if it should come to a bad pinch I could borrow a little, couldn't I? You've got plenty now!"

"Really? Where is it, Bill?"

"You've sold that stock, haven't you?"

"I have not."

"Lord! I supposed you had, long before this," William said in some astonishment. "Anyway, you will sell it some time soon. That's what the wink meant, of course."

Henry rolled the cigar to the other corner of his mouth.

"Then if you hadn't felt that that money was available, or some of it, you wouldn't have lapsed into matrimony?"

"Well—" William said, after a moment's reflection. "Thinking it over, father, maybe not. I don't know. Of course, we—we love each other something awful and we've been engaged for months. But it's only this last couple of weeks I've been insisting on getting married; yes, that's true."

Henry studied the pattern on the oilcloth.

"What are you going to do now, Bill?"

"Have a little honeymoon and get back to work—a darned little one, I guess. I couldn't get a leave of absence."

"Yes, but about money?"

"Oh, I drew five hundred dollars out of the savings bank!" William explained brightly.

"Half—half—of what you had there?" Henry gasped.

"A man can't get married on nothing," William explained.

"I give it up!" said Morrow. "Let's get back to your mother. She feels pretty badly about this."

She was drying her tears now. She smiled bravely enough at Henry and their son. William looked rather intelligently from one of his parents to the other.

"Well, it's over and we're all alive," he submitted cheerfully. "I guess Joy and I'll beat it for our half-portion honeymoon."

"Yes," Henry said flatly.

"And—well, say, dad, can I take the car? Just for a day or two? You see, originally, I thought you'd buy a new car, and I'd get that one and a month off and we'd go touring."

"Oh, *that* was it, was it?" Henry muttered. "Yes, I suppose—yes, take it!"

When the motor had clanked away, he dribbled into a chair and sat there stunned. Laura, winking rapidly now and then, huddled down on the sofa, her chin in her hands.

"Kind of—well, sudden!" Henry ventured.

"And we never even wished them happiness! My—my little boy!"

"Well, what if we didn't? What in blazes could they expect?" cried her husband. "Pulling a thing like that without a second's warning!"

Laura swallowed twice.

"My Will—our little baby boy—married! Married and gone!"

"He won't be gone long. They haven't anywhere to live," Henry said.

"No, they're coming back for my party," Laura sighed. "They may stay a day or two. That's something."

Henry hurled away his cigar and found a fresh one.

"They'll probably stay more than a day or two—unless they go next door to live," he said. "By Jehosaphat! I can't understand it! That boy's got no more idea of what he's jumped into than a wooden Indian! Lord! If he had to get married, why didn't he pick something—"

"Oh, Joy's all right," Laura sighed. "She—see who's ringing."

It was the thin, chilly forefinger of T. Wallace Harrison that pressed the button. Henry admitted Mr. Harrison and his wife and glared unveiled hostility at them. They looked no hot affection back at Henry Morrow—but at least Mrs. Harrison, in her effusive way, rushed to Laura and kissed her and then turned, throwing out her hands quite dramatically with:

"Well, they've gone and done it, haven't they?"

Laura nodded.

"The dear, foolish, romantic children!" Mrs. Harrison gushed.

"What is your view of this matter, Morrow?" her husband asked coldly.

"I—I haven't had time to form one yet," Henry confessed. "How do you feel about it?"

"I believe that I am neutral. That is to say, they are unquestionably too young to marry under present conditions. On the other hand, I must consider Joy an adult and I am not disposed to interfere.

"If you, however, wish to begin annulment proceedings I shall see that they are not contested."

Henry gazed at him, almost enviously. He was unperturbed, wasn't he? The words clicked along just as if they were coming out of a precision machine!

"Annulment? Oh—oh, I don't know. Not much use in that, is there, if they're determined to get married anyway?"

Mr. Harrison elevated his shoulders the fraction of one centimeter and subsided. His ornate wife babbled on and on. She was thunderstruck, Henry gleaned, and yet she considered William the dearest chap—the most lovable boy.

And he had picked the very sweetest girl in the world for a wife, if she was Mrs. Harrison's own daughter.

They were both so young and so dear—and so on and so forth, with no end of her babbling in sight, Henry noted gratefully, for in cold truth he himself did not yet know just what he did want to say on the subject. After a long time, Harrison addressed him directly:

"Is William able to support a wife?"

"He is, if they can live on thirty dollars a week," Henry said.

"We'll have to do something for them, of course."

"It seems likely!"

"I will give them five thousand dollars, Morrow. You give them five thousand," the steady, frosty voice continued. "That will be ten thousand and enough to start them with. And they must be made to understand that, with that reserve, they'll have to hoe their own row. Ten thousand dollars. I wonder if they'll be able to appreciate that?"

"Yes—yes!" Henry said dazedly. "So do I!"

Harrison glanced at his wife and cleared his throat.

"I have an eight forty-five appointment at the office in the morning, my dear. It is growing late."

Henry took them to the door. Henry returning to his living room and gazed at his own wife, still rather dazedly.

"That last one he got off was funny, wasn't it?" said Henry. "I didn't know there was a spark of humor in the man."

"There isn't. You mean about giving them something?"

"No—not something! *About giving them five thousand dollars!*"

Laura looked up.

"You don't intend simply to threw William on his own resources? He has none, you know."

"Well, neither have I—or mighty few! Do you—do *you* think he ought to have five thousand dollars, too?"

Laura's shoulders rose, much after the manner of Harrison's.

"It isn't a fortune," she murmured.

"It isn't, isn't it? Well, by—" Henry said, and said no more. He knew well enough what was in her mind; it was in everybody's mind around here and evidently playing the very devil with everybody's balance and behavior. And maybe it was natural enough that William, mentally and physically a gangling boy, should have been affected. But Laura, who had always been so sane and so steady and—by thunder! Laura was crying again!

Henry hurried to her and gathered her into his arms, commenting fully on the situation at last, and soothingly, and he did it rather well. After all, the sun wasn't going out just because a couple of fool kids had married. They'd get on all right; every one did, once they settled down to the business of life.

What if William hadn't said anything? What if he had lied about being at Henderson's? Probably Henry'd have done the same thing.

Later, when Laura's tears were dry, Ina and her Donald returned, the latter glancing annoyedly into a living room usually unoccupied at this hour. They heard the big news with proper amazement; they asked countless decorous questions.

Then Donald, after a noiseless kiss in the dark vestibule, went his respectable way and Ina passed on to bed and to dreamless sleep, which she did inevitably as if run by clockwork. A man would have darned little to fuss about if they were all like Ina!

Brantree wandered downstairs still later and for a time forgot his own troubles in the shock of William's escapade.

Midnight struck and the three were still there, talking about William and how on earth William was going to support a girl of Joy's rearing and whether—as Laura seemed to hope—they might not feel it wisest to come home here and live until they decided just what they did want to do.

And then the telephone jingled briskly and Henry rose and moved toward it with a sour:

"Probably lost the money his grandmother left him, by this time, and wants me to send him some more. Hello!"

"Mr. Morrow? Charles Burtis speaking," came to Henry's ear in a heavy voice. "Is Gerald there at your house? My son, Gerald?"

"He is not!" Henry snapped, and instantly stiffened. "Why?"

"Is your daughter Margey at home?"

"No! What's the matter?"

"Nothing at all, perhaps," the voice went on. "Nothing, of course, Mr. Morrow. But I understood Gerald to say that they were attending a dinner dance at the house of a friend and I happened to call up there a few minutes ago. They had not arrived."

"Well, you don't think—"

"Oh, they haven't been wrecked. My brother came in from Podham not ten minutes back, and he was almost certain that he had passed Gerald's car, going in the other direction."

The voice paused. Mr. Burtis, apparently, was awaiting the comment of

Mr. Morrow. Mr. Morrow, as yet, found himself unable to speak.

"This is not the first time the same thing has happened," the voice continued vibrantly. "Last week, Gerald told me that they were going to the affair at the Glenville Club. I discovered later that they were not present."

"Well, where were they? Where are they now?" Henry exploded.

"That is a point upon which I am distinctly uneasy," Burtis replied. "I can't understand the boy. He has been trained, sir, as I was trained—and that was with a rod of iron! I am absolutely positive that Gerald never told me a lie in all his life until—"

"I'm not at all interested in your family history!" Henry put in. "What I want to know is, where has that damned boy taken my little daughter to-night!"

"Now, see here, sir! I will not permit—"

"I don't care a rap what you'll permit! *Where are they?*"

There was another brief pause.

"I do not know. I have no clews at the moment, although I mean to do some telephoning. You're evidently in a rather excitable frame of mind this evening, Morrow," the other said coldly. "Perhaps I should have investigated a little farther on before consulting you.

"Suppose I call you up again, if I learn anything and they're not home by that time?"

"Do that!" Morrow barked. "I tell you—"

"But let us have no misunderstanding on one point," Burtis said, and his voice grew harder. "I assume that you do not approve my son. Well, you're not nearly so anxious as I, sir, to have this affair broken off! I have very definite plans for Gerald, and they most certainly do not include any entanglement with—"

"What was that?"

"Let us say that they include no girls at all for the next year or two. I would suggest this, Mr. Morrow: when they do return have Gerald in and telephone me at once. I'll be over within five minutes, and we will have a showdown of a sort which, I hope most earnestly, will end the nonsense for good and all. Will you agree to do that?"

Something had happened to Henry. His knees were uncertain; he was shaking all over; a cold trickle came down into one eye.

"Yes!" he said huskily. "And if you learn anything before that, call—call me at once!"

"I will," said Burtis.

Brantree and Laura were standing beside him, Henry observed foggily, both of them round-eyed.

Laura was crying.

"What is it, Hal? Has something happened to Margey?"

Henry's flitting weakness had passed. He was steady again now—astonishingly steady, in fact.

"Not an accident—no."

"Was that Mr. Burtis?"

"It was!"

"Well, what is it? Tell me! Why were you shouting at him?"

Henry's sudden smile passed description!

"I'll do more than shout at him, kid! When I've finished with his dirty little whelp I'll go around and put Burtis in the hospital!" he said.

"*What?*" Brantree cried.

Laura's slightly supercilious tranquillity was gone. Quite wildly, she looked at her brother and after her husband, who had tramped into the living room again.

"What—what does he mean?" she gasped.

"Your nice little Gerald!" Henry said violently. "The nice boy it was quite all right for Margey to be running around with! He's been lying to his father and teaching our kid to lie to us!"

"If you'll just—just quiet down and tell me?" Laura pleaded.

Henry did control himself to some extent.

"They didn't go to a dinner dance to-night, Laura. From what Burtis has been discovering, they haven't been going to any of these affairs and staying there until all hours of the night. Now do you get it?"

"No! What have they been doing?"

"That's what I'm trying not to think about, because I want to keep hold of myself till I can get my hands on Gerald!" said Henry. "They haven't been going to picture shows, because those houses close at eleven. I'll swear they haven't been sitting around dark roads, spooning in the car; that would be much too tame for that speedy pair.

They haven't been here decently, as they should have been, and they certainly haven't been at Burtis's house. What have they been doing until one and half past, every morning, then?"

"Harry!" Laura cried, and her cheeks flamed. "That's beastly of you!"

"Probably. I may be all wrong. Heaven knows nothing could make me happier than to know I was all wrong, Laura. Be a mighty different proposition if Gerald was just some kid working for a living. But I've seen too much of that sort of thing in my time—a rich boy playing around with a pretty little girl like Margey, in moderate circumstances. Hell! It's human nature to do anything you can get away with, isn't it?" Henry snarled. "A boy with a millionaire father feels perfectly safe."

"I—I don't believe it!" Laura whimpered.

"No, and I don't, either, and in spite of not having been asked for an opinion, I'll say you're raving crazy, Hank," said Brantree. "Marge simply isn't that kind of a kid."

"Margey is a child, too young to know what she's about, and she is infatuated with that young hound!"

"Bunk, Henry! They're wiser nowadays at fifteen than you were at twenty-five." Laura's brother laughed. "Sit down there! Bite the end off another cigar, take a couple of puffs and then come down to earth!"

He thrust Mr. Morrow into a chair with some force and stood over him, while Henry breathed heavily and stared up blackly.

"You've been fussing a good deal lately—I've helped with that, I suppose—and you're all shot up, too, Hank.

"Just because Marge isn't in bed by nine o'clock, she's not necessarily coming home some evening with a shawl over her head and the child in her arms! They all stay out late these days, all the kids, and I question very much whether they're any worse than they ever were. Now, wild man! Exactly what did Burtis say to start all this?"

Henry told them. Brantree laughed again and more genuinely, when he had asked a few questions. Laura failed to join his merriment. Laura was sniffing and Henry would have liked to comfort her, but there was that in Laura's eye when it wandered in his direction which made it seem an inopportune time for comforting of that sort.

Well, perhaps he *was* ashamed of himself and of his dark suspicions; pretty rotten for a man to find himself forced to think such things! But isn't it just the people who scout so indignantly similar possibilities in their own young ones, who find the children in the very worst messes?

Margey was just a baby, and that damned Burtis boy, with his football shoulders and his picture-hero profile, was the very type to turn her giddy little head.

Moreover, as Henry had learned from smoking-car gossip, things had been happening around here of which Laura was blissfully unaware. Two weeks ago they had raided the Twin

Pine road house, and the young woman booked as "Hannah Doe," who had spent one night in jail and paid a fine in the morning, had been none other than Dorothy Croucher, on the very next block!

And the nice young man who had taken her there—and incidentally had gone free by jumping through a closed window—had been young Steve Gilden, Gerald Burtis's bosom friend.

The fact that the Crouchers had suddenly sent Dorothy abroad for a year seemed pretty good corroborative evidence.

There was also the painful matter of little Sally Blyn, in Margey's own high school class—and the less said of that the better! But it showed the chances these flighty female kids were running, didn't it?

"I think," Henry said presently, "that I'll get a taxi and make the round of a few places I'd like to investigate!"

"I think you'll stay where you are!" Laura said.

"You bet he will!" Brantree assured her. "I'll sit on him!"

"What's going to happen," Henry smiled dangerously, "might better happen somewhere else than here. When that boy turns up I'll give him just five minutes to clean his whole slate and convince me that he isn't lying about it—and if he can't, I'll kill him!"

Laura glanced quickly at her brother.

"And you needn't go upstairs and take the cartridges out of my revolver," Henry added. "A job like this I'll do with my hands!"

One o'clock struck. Henry glanced his astonishment at the clock. At a time like this one might have thought the minutes would drag. They were doing anything but that! The long hand on that face was fairly whizzing around.

Queer how things worked out, eh? A couple of weeks ago he'd been going back and forth, office and house, bed and desk, humdrum as sin. Now, in a few more hours, he stood a wonderful chance of sitting behind steel bars and looking at his picture in the papers. Well, it would be amply worth it!

Margey had been his particular baby; her very first laugh had been for her father, and when she was restless and even Laura couldn't soothe her, she'd always quiet down as soon as Henry took her.

Once he got his hands on that neck and his thumbs into the windpipe, the devil himself couldn't drag Henry Morrow away!

"*There!*" Laura shrilled suddenly, and leaped from her chair. "Jimmy, telephone for Mr. Burtis, quickly, please! The number is two-eight-four. The car's outside now. Harry!"

"Let go of me!" Henry said impatiently. "I'm not going out to grab him there. I'm going to get him in here and give him a chance to explain."

"Will you please, please wait here?" Laura pleaded, and threw her arms about him. "Harry, please! Let me go out. I'll have him come in—I promise."

"But—"

A cold chill ran through Morrow. There was Margey's key, scraping in the lock as Brantree mumbled at the telephone. And now Margey was entering and Henry's throat closed as he looked at her—just a little child, laughing.

Margey smiled brightly.

"Oh, you're all up?" she observed. "That's good."

"Why—why—" Henry mouthed.

Margey looked at him in brief perplexity. Margey then looked from left to right, as if seeking an avenue of escape—and again she was facing her father, squarely enough.

"Well, because—er—because I want you to meet my husband!" she said. "He'll be in in a minute!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Ask Him Another

It was bad enough when McGloster, the old circus publicity man, took to writing advice to the lovelorn—but his next venture in the literary world was even more startling

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

"YOU write that stuff?" Bill pointed his finger accusingly, incredulously, at the half column of "Answers to Puzzled Lovers."

McGloster nodded smilingly.

"But it's signed 'Betty Berry.'"

"You can't always believe everything you read," replied McGloster.

"Listen to this, Jim!" Bill turned to me and read from the column:

"DEAR BETTY BERRY:

"Boy friend is mad at me because I let another nice young fellow kiss me at a dance last night. Boy friend says I oughtn't to let any fellow kiss me unless I've been introduced to him. He says he is through with me. What shall I do?

"PUZZLED LITTLE SWEETHEART.

"'Puzzled Little Sweetheart,' d'ye get that?" said Bill witheringly. He turned back to the paper. "Here's what Betty says:

"DEAR PUZZLED LITTLE SWEETHEART:

"Boy friend has good reason to be mad at you. You ought never, never let young fellows kiss you promiscuously, especially when you haven't been introduced to them. You should send a sweet note to boy friend, telling him that you are sorry and will never do it again.

"I didn't use that word 'promiscuously'; the editor stuck it in," interposed McGloster. He evidently realized that some sort of defense was expected.

"It isn't the 'promiscuously' that's objectionable; it's the whole blamed thing," declared Bill. "Why, it's nothing but a gob of mush."

"The circulation went up a hundred

copies daily after I started writing that column," said McGloster, a note of pride in his voice.

Bill made a gesture of despair and tossed the paper aside.

"And to think, Jim," he said, "that we used to pal around with 'Slim' McGloster back in the days when he was writing circus publicity stuff—and the best man in the game, too, at that—and look at him now; look at the stuff he's turning out."

Bill's voice trembled with emotion. For a hardened old drifter, Bill is inclined, at times, to be a bit sentimental.

"I think it's pretty good stuff," said McGloster defensively.

"So is gravy when it's on a heap of mashed potatoes; but not when it's on a white vest," said Bill.

"But nobody knows it's me that writes it," McGloster pointed out. He always did think a lot of Bill's opinion, and I could see that he was anxious to justify himself.

"That's just the point," declared Bill triumphantly. "Here you are posing as Beautiful Betty—"

"Betty Berry," corrected McGloster.

"Well, Betty Berry, then; it doesn't make much difference what's tacked on to the Betty part," said Bill. "Here you are a guy who always boasted that all the education you ever had you picked up in circus tents and working under some of the biggest press agents in the game, a guy who knows nothing about women—"

"I was press agent for two years for the Chicago Lady Godiva," interrupted McGloster.

"Well, you never married her, did you?" snapped Bill. "You are no more qualified to give anybody advice about love than Jim here is qualified to give anybody advice about anything."

It seemed to me rather unnecessary to drag me into the discussion, but I decided to let the insult pass unnoticed.

"Why, Slim, look at the big chance you are taking by gambling with fate." Bill was warming up to his theme in wonderful style. He always is at his best when he is trying to tell somebody else what to do. That's Bill all over.

"You may wreck scores of innocent lives," he continued. "Every time this sheet comes out"—he picked up the discarded paper and tapped it accusingly with his forefinger—"every time this sheet comes out you may be ruining the happiness of some young couple by telling them to do the wrong thing. They naturally assume that Betty Beauty—"

"Betty Berry," corrected McGloster.

"They naturally assume that Betty Berry knows what she is talking about. Right here in this column, you advise a young couple to elope—how the devil do you know they ought to elope?"

"If they've made up their mind to elope, nothing that I or anybody else might say would be apt to stop them," said McGloster. "They can get a divorce, can't they, if they find out later that they made a mistake?" he added weakly.

Bill looked at him in grieved surprise.

"Your moral fabric is being shot as full of holes as a chunk of imported Swiss cheese," he declared severely. "This daily deception is undermining your character. You are sailing under false colors, writing about something that you don't know anything about.

"I can remember the day when you were considered one of the squarest men that ever sat on a tent stake and watched the rehearsal of a clown act—and look at you now! Gol ding it, Slim, I'm afraid that you've slipped so far down on the moral toboggan that there's no hope of saving you."

McGloster squirmed uncomfortably. I could see that Bill had got under his skin.

"A guy's got to live," he said defensively. "And, furthermore, if I don't write this stuff somebody else will."

"What if somebody else does?" demanded Bill. "You wouldn't be fill-

ing the rôle of a false alarm. Whoever else it was wouldn't know any less than you do about love matters, I'll bet. Holy mackerel, I should think you would be afraid to go out alone with your conscience!"

If I had been McGloster I would have been tempted to knock Bill down. For my part, I didn't see that it was any of Bill's business whether McGloster earned a living by raising guinea pigs or by giving advice to the lovelorn; but, of course, McGloster, in the old days, always had looked on Bill as a sort of father confessor. Furthermore, Bill is almost old enough to be McGloster's old man.

"What would you have me do? Chuck up a good job and go to digging ditches?" demanded McGloster. "I'm the best conductor of the lovers' column they ever had on the *Billington Courier*—the old man told me so himself one day. 'Your stuff is snappy and right to the point,' he says. 'I always read it myself.'"

"I don't say you aren't a good writer," said Bill. "You always were one of the best press agents in the show game—our show went bang on the rocks a month after you quit us.

"That's the whole point; you're such a danged good writer that they wouldn't fire you if you demanded that they put you on a job that you could fill without endangering your own honest convictions or the lives of innocent young people."

Twenty-five years of selling corn salves and other high-class preparations under glaring gasoline torches have given Bill a beautiful gift of gab.

McGloster was favorably impressed.

"It doesn't make any difference to me what you do," Bill continued, "but I hate like blazes to see a good man going wrong."

"Gol ding it, Bill, I never looked at this thing from your angle, but I'll be hanged if I don't ask the old man for some other job to-morrow," declared McGloster. "I'll have to admit that I don't know much about love and that sort of slush. I'm through with the lovelorn column!"

He banged his fist on the desk with emphatic determination. Then, to show there were no hard feelings, he shook hands with Bill and me, and shortly thereafter, we departed.

"Well, I accomplished more this afternoon in helping to set the world right than most men accomplish in a lifetime," declared Bill complacently as we emerged into the street. He was glowing with righteousness.

"If McGloster only had had education, I bet he would have been a big man to-day," he added.

"He never would be if he listened to every idiot who came along and told him what he ought to do," I said. I hadn't forgotten the dirty crack which Bill had taken at me.

"I've put him on the right track, anyhow," said Bill.

"I don't know whether you did or not," I retorted. "For all you know, you may have ruined his career."

"McGloster's career is all right. That fellow will make good at anything he tackles," said Bill.

"He will if his fool friends leave him alone," I snapped.

We headed for the outskirts of the city en route for the State line. We had steered a bit from our course in order to hit Billington because we had heard that McGloster was there and we wanted to look him up.

II.

It was three weeks later. Bill and I were laid up at a little town near the border. We were anxious to press farther south, but were delayed by Bill's rheumatism, which made walking difficult for him. Not that we were in any particular hurry for, as usual, we had no special destination in view.

Pickings were slim, but we managed to dig up enough to keep us alive. Toward the end of the week, however,

we were to rock bottom, because a small town can't support a pair of drifters like Bill and me for more than a few days at a stretch.

I was beginning to wish that we had stuck around in Billington for awhile. I would have liked to know how McGloster had made out. Furthermore, in an emergency like the present one, he probably would have extended us some financial assistance.

Fortunately we met up with a young fellow who took pity on us and offered to blow us to a couple of cups of coffee. We were sitting with him in the little lunchroom quaffing the steaming beverage and swapping stories of the road. He was interested in the fact that Bill and I once were in the show game.

"You ought to go over to Millbrook; there's a guy over there who'll always lend a helping hand to old showmen," he remarked.

"How far is Millbrook from here?"

"Twenty-nine miles."

Bill groaned in despair.

"That counts us out," he sighed. "I'm all tied up with rheumatism and can't travel."

"Rheumatism?" The young fellow brightened perceptibly. "I can help you." He fumbled in an inner pocket and produced a piece of paper.

"Just try that," he said as he handed it over.

"What's this?" asked Bill curiously.

The young fellow smiled sociably. "I happened to spot that in the *Billington Courier* the other day. It gives a sure cure for rheumatism. I cut it out, thinking that it might come in handy.

"The *Courier* runs a column of medical advice every day—it's something new—snappy and well-written stuff—a Dr. McGloster writes it, and that bird sure does know his onions."

"Dr. McGloster writes it?" Bill echoed feebly.

"Sure; I guess he's a specialist of some kind. You better try his recipe," said the young fellow cheerfully.

"Yeh, you better try it, Bill," I interposed maliciously, but Bill was making so much noise finishing up his coffee that apparently he didn't hear me

THE END

Early Playing Cards

WHEN gentlemen—and ladies—commence their evening game of poker, or bridge, they little think that they are indebted to the heathen, and ancient, Hindu for the entertainment about to be had.

But, as a matter of historical fact, playing cards were brought into Europe in the fourteenth century by the Moors, who had obtained the idea from India during the Mohammedan invasion of that country, which began, roughly, just before the eleventh century.

The popular idea that cards were invented by the mad King, Charles VI of France, in 1393 is a mistake. They were in use in Europe before his time; and this reference only has to do with the *coloring* of a pack of cards for his use. Early European cards were hand colored, stenciled, and printed from wooden blocks.

The original cards of India were circular; and the London Royal Asiatic Society has a pack of cards that is over a thousand years old.

A 1678 Chinese dictionary says that cards were invented in 1120 A.D. by the reigning Chinese king for the amusement of his numerous concubines; but, India knowing them long before that date, they were doubtless introduced into China by the Indian Buddhist missionaries during their prolonged intercourse with their great northern neighbor.

Arthur Neale.

Heartbreak Trail

A story of 1855, in which a young man leaves luxury to struggle amid the murders and arson of the Kansas border war

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EYES WEST!"

CHAPTER XII.

REPUDIATION.

RIDING through the drifts in a night of Siberian cold, holding the girl in front of him, Reuel realized that he had been foolhardy in his haste and desperation.

He wore only his buckskin breeches and the heavy jacket which had served him for riding in the milder November weather. His head and shoulders were covered with the fur cap and muffler, but the gusts of wind on his back struck to the bone and the heart.

The horse was far spent and spiritless. It had been treated unkindly during the eventful hours at the cabin, and the rider in his contrition would not force it to hurry on the return journey.

Hetty appeared to suffer little discomfort from the exposure. The greatcoat muffled her slender form completely, and she seemed to doze in the half-sleep of fever and exhaustion.

Fortunately the blizzard had spent itself; otherwise the results of such a night march would have been doubtful. The wind was bitterly cruel, the cold intense, but it was possible to follow the trail with little difficulty.

Reuel rode directly to the hotel, turned his mount over to a hostler with directions for its care, and hastened into the building with his charge. Young enough to be easily embarrassed, he

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called peremptorily for Dr. Vincent to come and relieve him of responsibility, explaining that the girl was ill and in need of attention.

Vincent came quickly and conducted the Samaritan and his burden to his own apartment. He listened gravely to the harrowing story of the night, after placing Hetty gently on a couch.

"Too bad! Too bad!" he said sorrowfully. "I can't tell much about her yet. It's exhaustion—collapse, you see. How far it will go remains to be seen.

"You did the right thing, Tristram," he added feelingly. "She couldn't have lived in that place. But pardon me if I ask you what—well, what you propose to do with her. That's your own personal business, to be sure, but I'm sincerely interested. Do you contemplate marriage?"

"Good Lord, what a question!" cried Reuel, startled and indignant.

"It's fine to be young, but youth is reckless of consequences," said the doctor. "I dare say you have done all this quite impulsively, and have yet to figure out the immediate or the more remote future.

"I have often pondered," he went on philosophically, "the complicated genesis of love. It's a question, whether love inspired by pity, or the love that springs spontaneously from normal mutual attraction, is the stronger.

"I've known men to lay their hearts and souls at the feet of comparatively unattractive women who were helpless invalids or cripples; I've known the most idyllic unions of well-matched, normal persons to come to grief."

"But—oh, I say, Dr. Vincent, I—"

"Forgive me; I was generalizing," the doctor hurried on. "I'm quite well aware that Hetty is neither a chronic invalid nor a cripple; yet few persons would inspire more profound pity.

"On the other hand, my dear fellow, I freely admit her natural attractions. It's not hard to picture her as positively beautiful, in the proper environment.

"She is young and has had little chance to develop herself physically or mentally; but you are acute enough to visualize the possibilities, and to your chivalrous soul the beauty and charm are there already."

Reuel exploded in a rage.

"Don't be an ass, Vincent!" he cried. "I wonder at the obtuseness of keenly intelligent, educated men like yourself; I can't help it! Is it so rare, is it so inconceivable, for a man to do a kind act toward a woman without selfish motives? Should I abandon a girl to a life of sordid suffering because I do not happen to covet her?"

"You young idealists often hoodwink yourselves in your romantic flights," laughed the doctor patiently.

"Romantic flubdub!" growled Reuel angrily. "Can you possibly understand that I am sincerely devoted to another lady, while trying to be of some service to this girl? I am betrothed to Miss Reynolds of Washington, and it's because I love her—if you must know. I'll ask you to take my word that I am not flighty or fickle; I've never been a gay philanderer."

"I beg you to accept my apology," said Vincent, a little stiffly. "I must admit my error; I stand corrected, sir.

"And now, these complex matters being disposed of so completely," he said, with a return to his natural good humor, "I must help you to provide accommodation for the poor child.

"Luther Roberts's wife arrived here yesterday from the East—came out through St. Louis and is going to live here in the hotel for the present. She's a fine New England woman, very practical and sensible, and obviously kind. I'll talk with her at once, and we'll place poor Hetty in her care."

"Please give me credit for being a philanthropist in a small way," said Reuel, with a touch of sarcasm, "and don't be suspicious of my motives when I say that I want to pay for the accommodations. I can afford it, and some one will have to pay."

"Really, you punish me severely for my tactless blundering," laughed the doctor. "I'll do my best to arrange everything with the nicest discretion."

To Reuel's satisfaction and relief, Hetty was established under Mrs. Roberts's care that night, and made comfortable according to the physician's directions.

As a matter of courtesy the young man allowed himself to be taken to the Roberts apartment and presented to the lady, that he might thank her for her kindness.

"It's a pleasure to be of some service, I assure you, Mr. Tristram," she said. "The little girl is fortunate to have a true friend like you. And really, she's a dear, sweet little thing. I'm sure I don't blame you a bit for—"

"My dear Mrs. Roberts," Reuel interrupted with polite severity, "will you permit me to tell you that, though young, I have never been romantic in the general sense? I am naturally practical and rather prosaically inclined, and it pleases me to devote a modest portion of my income to certain small philanthropies.

"You'll therefore understand, I'm sure, that I have no sentimental interest whatever in Miss Leeds. I'm engaged to a lady in Washington and, at home or abroad, I am habitually scrupulous in matters of conduct and deportment."

He went to his room in a fine rage, and remembered for the first time that he had been chilled and almost ill on arrival at the hotel. The hotel was comfortably appointed, and there was a stove in his room, so he began to feel more contented and at ease as he relaxed and divested himself of the heavy, damp clothing.

It pleased him presently, in spite of the lateness of the hour, to devote some minutes to the one with the greatest claim upon his attention. He wrote to Miranda a brief summary of the recent hours of excitement, disorder, and tragedy.

Momentous public events were disposed of in a few scratches of the pen, but he took conscientious pains to relate the story of Hetty Leeds in detail, though he avoided any suggestion of pride in his own part in the melancholy drama.

The reply which came to him in due time amply justified the confidence that he reposed in Miranda's invariable good sense and perfect understanding. She wrote:

> Do you not fear, dear Reuel, that your Miranda may be the very least bit jealous of the poor little bird of passage who has so engaged your attention and compassion?
>
> But no, dearest boy, you would never give a thought to such folly. Our love and our understanding of each other are too perfect, too complete, for that.
>
> Be assured that I am very proud of my Tristram, my perfect gentle knight —very proud indeed that my true love is of a different mold, a different clay, from the frivolous dandies of our social circle who wear their hearts on their sleeves and find new infatuations in every cup of China tea and every figure of the dance.

Hubert Dawson, hobbling about the hotel on his crutches, was fast recovering the use of his leg. He applauded Reuel's rescue of Hetty from the Leeds home and made no reference to motives or consequences; therefore Reuel valued him even more highly than before for his good taste and wisdom.

"If that Eustace comes snooping and whining around here after that little girl, don't you be bothered with him, Reuel," said Hubert. "Tell him you're busy and refer him to me.

"I might give that poor, unappreciated feller a new start in life—a regular runnin' start. I'd hate to run so far myself, but I'd take pleasure in keeping that varmint on the jump all the way to Oregon."

After the blizzard the town got back to normal conditions. The army of defense was disbanded and there was a general resumption of business. The

people of Lawrence welcomed peace and the treaty between the contending factions, but Samuel Jones, sheriff of the county, and Senator Atchison and Dr. Stringfellow, his powerful supporters, were satisfied neither with the treaty nor with the mediation of Governor Shannon.

Jones had broken bread with General Robinson at a peace-treaty dinner in Lawrence, and there were enthusiastic speeches, toasts, and general merry-making, but the sheriff went away from the dinner vowing that he would yet sack the town and drive every Yankee abolitionist over the border.

Atchison, who had served as acting Vice President of the United States, counseled the treaty and applauded its adoption, but no sooner was it put in effect than he set about the organization of a spring invasion of Kansas.

Under his eloquent persuasion and broad influence, large funds were raised in the Southern States for the recruiting and equipment of such an army for open guerrilla warfare, and with prophetic vision he promised the South that such a movement in the spring of 1856 would be the beginning of the greatest civil war in history, which should spread over the continent and establish slavery permanently in the land, securing for all Southerners a golden age of peace and prosperity.

Reuel had written periodically to his uncle in Washington, describing in some detail the conditions in the territory, but he was careful to avoid the inclusion of matters essentially personal. Senator Tristram lived his life in an official atmosphere, and had succeeded in excluding from his narrow cosmos the strictly personal element.

His brief replies to his nephew's communications were little more than formal acknowledgments, and contained little of approbation or criticism, but once or twice he had admonished him to maintain a strictly impersonal attitude in his relations with the people of the territory.

Early in January a man from Washington called at the hotel and asked for Reuel Tristram. He introduced himself as Martin Atwood, a lawyer, friend of Senator Tristram and of Governor Shannon, and announced that the Senator had requested him to call on his nephew while passing through the territory on private business.

Reuel established the visitor by the stove in his room and offered him cheroots, and the man chatted affably of affairs in Washington and political gossip of the day.

"The Senator fears that you may be finding this rather primitive life in Kansas somewhat irksome, Mr. Tristram," he said at last. "I enjoy the Senator's confidence, and I may say frankly that he asked me to look in on you and tell him something of your personal activities. If you are ready to come home, I believe that he is quite willing to have you."

"I've written regularly to my uncle," said Reuel, a trifle coldly. "As a rule, I have omitted matters of a strictly personal nature, as of no material interest to him."

Mr. Atwood smiled broadly.

"Such as killing a man, for example, Mr. Tristram?"

Reuel flushed vividly.

"I naturally supposed that news of that incident would reach Washington in time," he said. "I was prepared to submit a report and explanation if the Senator desired it. The affair *was* of a strictly personal nature, and without political significance. The man threatened to shoot me, and I was fortunate enough to be the first to fire."

Mr. Atwood smoked contentedly and stared at his host quite frankly, as though forming a personal estimate.

"Permit me to observe that you are distinctly the Senator's nephew. I believe the Senator would treat a tragical episode as something of merely casual importance.

"Between you and me, Mr. Tristram, I think that your uncle is begin-

ning to feel that it's time for you to come home. He has heard that you bore arms, in a more or less official capacity, in a recent local disturbance. That, you'll freely admit, of course, is not altogether in keeping with your uncle's desire that you should act as a disinterested observer."

"Flesh and blood can stand just so much!" said Reuel tersely.

"And youth is impulsive and impatient; I reminded the Senator of that aspect of the case."

"Did he send you here to fetch me home?"

"Why, really, Mr. Tristram, I'm not here under orders. It seemed to be a matter in which personal contact was needed. He couldn't come out here himself, and I was coming anyway on other business. Let us say that I am desirous of being your friend, your adviser. I'd go home if I were you, Mr. Tristram.

"Furthermore, I'll whisper to you that your uncle is not in anything like an impatient or unfriendly mood. Perhaps he has a broader understanding than we give him credit for. He mentioned to me that there's a strong possibility of a certain secretaryship in the foreign service. He thought that a sojourn in—say, Vienna, would appeal to you as a welcome change."

"I'm inclined to classify this present experience as foreign service," Reuel said dryly. "I'm sure his excellency, the President, is in much closer touch with affairs in Europe than he is with the life of his fellow citizens in Kansas.

"There has been a civil war here, Mr. Atwood, with the marshaling of troops, actual hostilities, and incidentally a treaty of peace. From all we can learn or observe, President Pierce has never heard of it: he has manifested no interest or concern; even the Governor that he appointed for the territory has gone away, probably to rest and get away from unpleasant scenes and embarrassing contacts."

"I know very little of the conditions here," said Mr. Atwood. "There's always some disorder in the opening of new territory. Kansas looms large to the man standing on Kansas soil, Mr. Tristram, but if you look on the map you'll find it rather small, considering the whole country. The official eye of President Pierce has to sweep from Maine to California. Do you envy him his position?"

"Neither his position nor his character!" said Reuel impulsively.

"Tut, tut, tut!" gasped the visitor, and positively changed color in his consternation. "Come now, let us strike that out, as they say in court. I'll forget that you said it, or that I heard it."

"You needn't, on my account. I'd say it again before other witnesses."

"Pray, take thought, Mr. Tristram," pleaded the man earnestly. "You have some one to consider beside yourself. We have an election coming on, and—"

"And until that is over," Reuel broke in angrily, "riot, murder, arson, rape, and brigandage can go on in Kansas without restraint. Tell my uncle, if you please—as I will tell him also, that I choose to quit his service at once. I find that I'm not cut out for a political career, either at home or abroad."

"But that's the wildest folly, my friend! You are betraying an immature impulsiveness, you are acting like a schoolboy."

"Perhaps so: schoolboys have ideals, standards of conduct, a certain unspoiled sense of honor. Tell my uncle that I am resolved to abandon all ideas of a diplomatic career or anything relating to political preferment. Any other course of action would be inconsistent with my plans for the future.

"If the national government elects to make slave-holding a nation-wide practice, if it recognizes banditry and persecution as part of a national policy, then I shall renounce my citizenship and stand outlawed with the patriots whose fathers planted the standard of freedom in New England."

"Young man, I shall not tell him that!" said Atwood tragically. "I honor and esteem your uncle, and such a message would break his heart."

"Then the greater shame to him, and to the Tristram family!" said Reuel fiercely.

CHAPTER XIII.

REVELATION.

"HETTY is very ill, Tristram," Dr. Vincent said that evening, coming into Reuel's room as he was sitting alone in moody reflection upon his interview with the man from Washington. "I've scarcely been able to give the malady a name.

"The fever has lasted far too long, and I'm puzzled as to its origin. I've tried bleeding, with little benefit, and her vitality is too low for any more of that, though it's advocated by our best practitioners.

"She's had calomel till I'm positively fearful of mercury poisoning, and I've stimulated her heart almost beyond reason. It's as feeble as a sparrow's heart now, but I'm afraid that further stimulation will crack it. I hope you'll believe that I've not been indifferent. The most important person in all my practice could not have been given more earnest and conscientious attention."

"I'm sure of that, doctor. I wish she might live, but I knew that she had a rather feeble hold on life when I brought her here. I feel that we have all tried to help her, and—I wish we might have had more success.

"But you know, Vincent, that you're not required to hold yourself responsible to me. We're all her friends, and we've done our best. Mrs. Roberts has been a devoted mother to her. You think that—that she's dying, don't you, Vincent?"

"I won't say that!" declared the doctor with professional caution. "But I'm fearful—I'm very doubtful. I was going to ask you if we ought to fetch her mother. As for her father, I can't abide the thought."

"By every standard of human conduct and sentiment, we ought to fetch her mother," said Reuel gravely, "but—I hope you'll understand me when I say that if she had the smallest chance to live, the coming of her mother might kill her."

"Precisely!" exclaimed the doctor, apparently gratified. "We may be cruel and unnatural, Tristram, but the mother's idea of parental devotion is too crude, too violent. She'd wail, she'd apostrophize the deity, she'd make a disturbance that would inevitably prove fatal. I think we're in agreement."

"Is she conscious?" Reuel inquired.

"Part of the time. Her mind wanders, and comes back. If the fever were more typical of any definite distemper, I'd say that it approaches a crisis. But there have been apparent crises already, and the fever goes on. To-day she—I hope it won't annoy you, but she has called repeatedly for you; that is, in her irrational moments. We should have sent for you, but it means nothing. One never knows what turn the mind will take in delirium."

"Who am I to be annoyed?" asked the young man a little sharply. "Perhaps it's not altogether flattering that the poor child asked for me only in her madness, but I'll go to her.

"If she knows how ill she is, there might be some word she would give me—some wish to express. I'll go at once. I might ask her if she wants to see her mother—or even her father or sister. We are not the ones to make the decision."

He left Vincent and went to the Roberts's apartment. The kindly and anxious Mrs. Roberts was gratified at his coming, and took him to the sick room.

"Hetty, my dear," she whispered softly, "here's a friend to see you. Mr. Tristram has come and he hopes you are feeling better."

The small head turned slightly on

the pillow, and Reuel was startled at the whiteness of the shrunken and pinched features.

"Who's that? Who's Mr. Tristram?" Hetty asked faintly.

Then, to their distress, she began to sing, in a voice that was scarcely more than audible. She breathed snatches of old sentimental ballads, going from one to another quite irrationally.

"Where's Reuel?" she demanded suddenly in a stronger voice.

He gave a nervous start and took a step forward.

Mrs. Roberts gently restrained him.

"It will do no good to speak to her now," she said. "She wouldn't know you. Sometimes she comes to herself after one of these spells."

"Reuel!" called the sick girl, on a shrill but painfully appealing note, and he glanced at Mrs. Roberts and shuddered.

"*Why* couldn't Reuel love me?" Hetty demanded argumentatively. "Why haven't I as good a right as any one? Damn that Washington woman! Damn Governor Shannon and President Pierce. Who's Miss Washington anyhow?—she's going to hell with all the others—President Pierce and all!

"My father—my dirty old father's going to be the President, and I'm going to marry Reuel. Reuel's mine! I'll fight for 'im! Tell that strumpet in Washington to come and fight me if she wants 'im."

"This," murmured Reuel, catching at Mrs. Roberts's arm, "is too frightful!"

"Little Hector's dead!" shrilled the girl. "Old Frank Pierce o' New Hampshire shot 'im, so he couldn't be President. Reuel can't be President either—he belongs to me! I'll kill myself if he goes to Washington to be President. I'll kill that woman and kill myself. Gran'ma says she'll make me a charm to make Reuel love me—but she's just an old barn owl; she's got feathers and claws."

Her voice weakened suddenly, and she began to hum a tune. Presently she stopped and lay quiet.

"I think I'll slip away now," Reuel whispered hoarsely.

"Just a moment," pleaded Mrs. Roberts. "Hetty, are you awake?"

"That you, Mrs. Roberts?" murmured the girl.

"Mr. Tristram is here to see you, Hetty."

The small head turned again, and the fever-bright eyes sought the visitor's face.

"Mr. Tristram," she breathed faintly, with the ghost of a welcoming smile. "It—it's kind of Mr. Tristram—to come."

"I was hoping to find you better, Hetty," he said awkwardly. "I'm afraid you're very tired and weak. I'll come again when you're stronger."

"I'm not so sick," she whispered, "but—very tired. Thank you for coming."

"If there's anything you want—if you'd care to send any word to your mother, I'll—"

"Send her my love," she said, in a different tone. "Tell her I'll come home to see her when I'm well. Mrs. Roberts is really my mother, you know. What am I doing here, anyhow, Mr. Tristram? Where is this place? Is it Washington? Reuel's in Washington, and—do you know Reuel, Mr. Tristram? Reuel's my lover, and I'm his sweetheart in Washington."

"Come!" whispered Mrs. Roberts, and led him quickly out of the room, shutting the door softly behind them.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Tristram," she said, as they paused in the little parlor of the apartment. "You see, it does no good to come to see her; and she's much worse to-night. I'm fearful of to-night, and Dr. Vincent said he'd come back and stay till morning, or—"

"I know," said Reuel shortly. "It's all horribly sad, Mrs. Roberts. You don't know me well, but I know you are very kind, and I'd like to ask a particular favor of you."

"By all means, Mr. Tristram."

"It's like this. Delirium in itself is considered rather lightly by most people. It's not unusual for persons to talk and joke about one's irrational utterances after an illness. But I want to ask you to let what we heard just now remain a secret between us, Mrs. Roberts.

"If—well, if Hetty should recover, and should ask you what sort of things she said in her delirium, I wish you would avoid letting her know that she called my name or talked about me. I think it would embarrass her seriously, and I'm really thinking of her peace of mind as well as my own.

"The things she said were too—perhaps you'll appreciate what I mean if I say they were too intimate, too significant."

"I understand perfectly, Mr. Tristram. You can rely on me to keep the secret. We both know Hetty, I think, and we know that she'd rather have her tongue torn out than say the things that we heard."

Reuel met Vincent after leaving the apartment.

"Did she recognize you?" asked the doctor.

"For a moment only. She's very ill, indeed."

"I hope she didn't upset you, Tristram. Fever patients are often quite outrageous and shocking in their ravings."

"Shocking, of course," Reuel agreed with a shrug. "But that's to be expected. It was all very incoherent and meaningless. You'll keep me posted, of course. I'd like to have some one call me, if—"

"To be sure," agreed the doctor, and went on his way to the Roberts apartment.

Reuel hurried to his room, hoping that no one would intercept him, as he did not feel like talking, but Hubert, with the honest familiarity of friendship, had entered in his absence and was waiting for him.

"I hear the little filly is bad off, Reuel," said the big fellow plaintively. "Doc Vincent was sent for out to Franklin, and he wouldn't go; said he wouldn't leave the house to-night, on account o' Hetty."

"She is bad off, Hubert! Why in Heaven's name will poor people leave a fairly tolerable, comfortable home in a civilized community, where there's work to be had in mills and business places, and travel halfway across the continent into a savage wilderness? What hardships I've had here I might have avoided, but these penniless settlers are helpless—at the mercy of wind and weather, to say nothing of devilish human hyenas.

"I guess my nerves are unstrung, Hubert; I guess I've seen too much of human kind out here. The emigration agents in the East have been forced to admit that the death rate among the settlers is high. They ascribe it to lack of preparation for primitive conditions, and to the usual inroads of diseases like smallpox, dysentery, and the like.

"They haven't tallied up the deaths caused by broken hearts! You can't tear a lily out of a shady garden by the roots, throw it out in a field of rank weeds, and expect it to live and grow!"

"Hetty was sort of a little tiger lily," mused Hubert, evidently disposed to revise Reuel's imagery into accurate metaphor, "but she never was born to grow among burdocks and thistles, nohow. I tell you, Reuel, I'd 'a' married that little girl in a minute if she'd had me."

A large tear trickled down the big fellow's rough cheek into his shaggy beard, and the sight of it made Reuel take a quick breath and swallow hard.

"Why couldn't she see that there was happiness for her that way?" he groaned. "Kansas has ruined my happiness, Hubert. Last fall I was a carefree, optimistic, cheerful damned fool in Washington. In these few months I've become a hopeless cynic, the rankest kind of a pessimist; I don't

think I'll ever get back my faith in the essential goodness of things on God's earth.

"We know there are great, good men around us—General Robinson here, Luther Roberts—a lot of them; but what's the use of all their striving against such a horde of the devil's own imps?

"A free country! God bless the Stars and Stripes! Sound the trumpets, beat the drums! Long live the President of the United States!

"*Bah!* His infernal excellency, President Franklin Pierce is very busy telling refined jokes over the teacups in Washington drawing-rooms, while his own appointees in the territorial government are hiring professional cutthroats to butcher men and women."

"Where do you reckon you're going from here, Reuel?" Hubert inquired anxiously, naïvely, quite overcome by his young friend's bitter eloquence.

"I wish I knew of a place to go," said Reuel with a long sigh. "I'd keep away from the damnable sophistication of the large cities. Iowa and Minnesota seemed like promising, peaceful places. There's no slavery in the Northern territories, and the settlers have been thrifty and law-abiding.

"But only the confirmed bachelor is foot-loose, Hubert, and I quickly renounced single harness when first I saw Miranda. If Miranda could bear to quit fashionable society and leave the cities, I'd take her north and be a farmer on the Northern prairies.

"I have some money of my own, you know, and there'd be no desperate struggle. I'd be independent, I'd have no boss, and all the misbegotten politicians could twiddle their thumbs outside my fences."

"I have no Miranda in my life," mused Hubert, a pathetic quaver in his voice, "and I'm kind of a lonely son-of-a-gun, but I'd like to settle down if there was a likely place to settle. What you goin' to do, Reuel, if that Miranda lady don't want to quit the cities?"

"Why, I suppose her companionship should be enough happiness for any man, and I'll have to make her people my people, and her God my God. But I shall be an unpleasant old gentleman, Hubert, for at the age of twenty-three I have formed a poor opinion of my fellow men."

It was well after midnight when Hubert went to his own room. Reuel felt exhausted, but he shook down the cinders in the sheet iron stove, replenished the fuel, and sat down close to the stove, turning up the collar of his jacket, jamming his hands deep into the pockets, and shivering a little.

The wind howled about the building, shook the windows, and strained at the window panes as though it would burst them inward. Some wagons passed the hotel, and their wheels creaked in the dry, powdery snow, while the drivers yelled and swore at the mules.

The winter seemed a melancholy and ungracious season, and then the young man wondered why people sought homes in such a region when there were smiling lands of perpetual summer waiting to be colonized.

The mule drivers were probably hurrying overland with freight for some river steamer farther south, and their wagons would be stalled in the snowdrifts again and again on the open road.

They would work prodigiously with shovels, cursing and abusing the mules, and fight their way onward from drift to drift. There was a great deal of gratuitous, incidental labor and pain in the world's work, and the victims seemed strangely supine, doing little to better their lot or alleviate the pain.

Near four o'clock some misguided rooster crowed prematurely in a neighboring yard, and Reuel was unduly irritated by the bird's presumption.

Boards creaked in the corridor outside the door, and advancing steps sounded unusually heavy and loud in the deathly stillness of the night.

Reuel sprang up as an icy chill shot from back of his neck to his heels, and flung open the door.

Vincent stepped in. His eyes were tired and sunken, he needed shaving, and he looked generally disheveled, but a faint smile touched the corners of his mouth.

"I rather think she'll pull through," he said.

"Thank God!" Reuel gasped, and sat down heavily in his chair.

"It was a crisis! We fought it out through the night. The fever has dropped, and she's asleep."

"Life is very odd, isn't it?" said Reuel in a hard, dry voice. "Hector had to give it up—and he might have made something of himself. Poor Hetty has been granted a reprieve, it seems—and I wonder if she wanted it. I wonder, Vincent, what she has to live for? I wonder why we all prayed that she might not die!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PATERNAL VIGILANCE.

VINCENT stopped at the Leeds place a few days later and told the family of Hetty's illness and her encouraging convalescence. They had been snowbound for a long time, existing on short rations—eked out by beef from a cow that Eustace heroically dug out of a snowbank—and there was a general condition of dull apathy.

The doctor's message was not received graciously. There was some resentment toward Hetty, and they took the report of her long illness with a suspicion of skepticism.

There had been a funeral of a sort, arranged with the help of townspeople of the same religious persuasion as the Leedses, and they looked upon Hetty's absence from that funeral as a mark of depravity; of all human events a funeral appeared to them as the supreme test of family loyalty.

Vincent was impatient and, having delivered his message, he left the house abruptly, declining to listen to an arraignment of the absent daughter.

Presently Eustace appeared at the hotel in Lawrence, and found his way to Reuel Tristram's room.

"Mr. Tristram," he said in a commanding voice and a manner almost impressive, "where is my daughter?"

"Why, you know well enough where Hetty is," Reuel answered, bristling a little at the elder man's peremptory tone. "She's here, where she's been all along."

"Here?" challenged the father, affecting to survey the small chamber minutely. "I fail to see her. But I intend to see her, Mr. Tristram. Is she hiding? Have you concealed her from her parents?"

"Come with me!" ordered Reuel angrily. "There's no mystery here, Mr. Leeds. You know well enough that Hetty is with Mrs. Roberts, where she has been for a long time."

He hustled the man out of his room and guided him unceremoniously to the Roberts apartment.

Hetty was sitting up in bed, supported by a mass of pillows, reading a book. She was pale and thin, pathetically wraithlike and a little wistful. She was startled at the sudden appearance of her sire, but she greeted him and looked expectantly over his shoulder, thinking that her mother might be there.

"The lap of luxury, eh?" he challenged. "Feather beds and stuffed counterpanes! Hen feather pillers and white bed clo'es. Boards an' a straw sack and some horse blankets—them are good enough for my mother, 'most eighty years old. Sick, eh? So am I—so's your mother—all of us. Half frozen, half starved—an' no hotel to go to—*but we got our pride left, praise God!*"

Vincent stepped into the apartment in time to hear the last of the oration.

"See here, Leeds," he cried angrily, "I won't have it! She's not well

enough to stand it. You'll have to get out."

"All in good time," said Eustace with extraordinary bravado. "I've come here to say my say, an' I'm goin' to say it out, Mr. Doctor. An' what I'm goin' to say is mostly to this gen'leman, Mr. Tristram," he went on quickly. "I'm speaking for myself and the family of this girl here. What you going to do with 'er, Mr. Tristram? We come from a line of proud and respectable Christian folks, we do. Our family name ain't going to be dragged in the mud an' tromped on by any fine gen'leman for his own amusement."

"Don't let him go on, Dr. Vincent!" cried Hetty. "I can't stand it—it's too much!"

"Look at me, girl!" commanded Eustace. "Look at your father, an honest man. Are you a good girl? Can you look your lovin' mother in the face and say you are?"

"Damn you, shut your mouth and get out!" snarled Vincent, clapping a heavy hand on his shoulder.

Eustace cringed instinctively, but caught at a chair and braced himself.

"Wait! You jus' wait!" he said. "I'm going to hear what Mr. Tristram has to say.

"I want to know, young gen'leman, if—as might happen—I've been wrong about all this. Are you a gen'leman of hon'rable intentions? Was you comin' to me like a man an' ask me for my child in holy wedlock? Have you proposed to my daughter to enter into the state o' holy matrimony, *or haven't you?*"

"Stop! I tell you to stop!" screamed the girl. "You know better than to say these awful things! Mr. Tristram brought me here, to Mrs. Roberts, that's all! He brought me because I'd 'a' died if he hadn't. Everybody knows that. He doesn't care anything about *me*—not so much as a snap o' the finger. And I don't hardly know *him*. He's Mr. Tristram—from Washington. What do I care about him? What *should* I care? He's not my kind. I never—"

"Hetty! Hetty!" exclaimed Vincent, honestly indignant and disturbed. "Think what you're saying, Hetty. Mr. Tristram is your best friend, my dear girl. Who but Mr. Tristram thought of saving you, of helping you? And you can't say that you don't care about him! When you were ill unto death your mind turned always upon *him*. His name was the only one on your lips—'Reuel! Reuel!'—I heard it fifty times. And you're willing to hurt him now!"

"You lie!" she cried tragically.

"This must be stopped!" declared Reuel. "It—it's too outrageous. You were crazy to bring up such a thing, Vincent."

"I was crazy!" exclaimed Hetty, grasping at the thought. "Don't you all know I was crazy? And wouldn't I be crazy to say such things?"

"Truth emerges from the subconscious mind in delirium," announced Vincent stiffly.

"Truth!" she echoed scornfully, though a sob rose in her throat and choked her. "There'd be no truth if I said I cared for *him!* I hope I never see him again. I didn't ask for his charity. I didn't want it. He's the fine gentleman—the stuck-up swell! They all want to help the poor, and think how good and kind they are. I don't thank him for what he's done for me, and I'll pay him back some day. I want to go home; I don't belong here!"

"But first, you all got to listen to me!" thundered Eustace. "I still got something to say to these gen'lemen."

The loud voices in noisy altercation had drawn other persons in the small hotel to the Roberts apartment. Hubert Dawson suddenly strode into the middle of the room and seized Leeds roughly by the collar.

"You come with me, Eustace!" he commanded.

"You le' me go—take your hands

offen me!" howled the man, struggling for freedom.

"You come along," insisted Hubert. "I'm going to help you, Eustace. I'm going to help you get away from here—an' you're goin' a damned long way from here, before I let you out o' my sight."

He dragged the struggling captive toward the door, deaf to his wild protests; and before he reached the door, Reuel slipped quietly through it and ran through the halls to his room.

The young man's face burned hotly, and anger surged within his breast. It appeared that Vincent had made a fool of himself and of Reuel, with the best of intentions, but murder was not too great a punishment to be thought of for him.

A letter from Washington had been slipped under the door of the room, and he tore the envelope roughly and glanced at the sheet.

Senator Tristram had written quite evidently upon the inspiration of the report furnished him by Mr. Atwood. To Reuel's astonishment, his uncle was not unusually severe. He was almost kindly, and far from arbitrary.

He requested Reuel to hasten to Washington without delay, that they might talk together and come, if possible, to a mutual understanding.

The distinguished legislator's courtesy and consideration moved his nephew to unwontedly tender emotions. He began with rather extravagant haste to empty the drawers of his dressers and to pack his saddlebags for a trip on horseback and a longer journey by water and by rail.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET.

"WHEN your father and I were lads," said Senator Tristram, "I believe it was the general opinion in our community that we were a pair of graceless wild asses. Adolescence continues, theoretically, to the age of twenty-five, and I can remember escapades of my own at that age which make me wonder that I became a reputable member of society.

"However, sir, I enjoy the gratification of reflecting that in my wildest hours, when I doubtless appeared most insensible to family pride and filial responsibility, I never placed in jeopardy the dignity of my father nor brought confusion upon him in that distinguished circle of which he was a criterion and an ornament.

"Do you, as my nephew, choose deliberately to force me to a most distressing choice of courses—whether to repudiate you before my friends and my constituency as a fellow unworthy the name and blood, or to draw my cloak over my face in the ancient Roman fashion and retire abjectly into the obscurity of the halls of shame?"

Reuel was astonished, but not chastened. The letter had been encouraging, but the personal interview opened with little promise of a happy ending.

"I regret, sir," he began with sober deference, "that—"

"Well, well, what do you regret?" barked the Senator, and brought his fist down upon the polished mahogany of his study desk with such force that the ink pots and sundry trinkets danced and jingled.

"Why, for one thing," said Reuel, with sudden wickedness, "that you have so small an audience for so admirable an exhibition of rhetoric."

"Damn me! You are a scapegrace!" gasped his uncle. "Have you no respect for your elders—your betters? Rhetoric, you say! Has rhetoric, then, become in this day a matter for ridicule?"

"I should hazard the guess that it bids fair to do so. Incongruity has its effect ultimately upon the masses. If legislators saw the air and address their audiences in sounding, stately periods, while farms and homes are burning and citizens are being murdered,

robbed, and pilloried in broad daylight, why, then, it will not be long before the rhetoric will have spent its force—sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!"

"You have a certain trick of words," observed the Senator. "It is likely to become dangerous when combined with tricks of an ill-ordered mind. God forbid we should have you a noisy spellbinder like this man Sumner, or a mouthing fanatic such as that John Brown that is confounding abolitionists with his insane devotion to their cause."

"I have made no speeches."

"But your acts have made a noise, sir! Shooting a man in cold blood, in a frenzy of vulgar prejudice—fighting like a bully-boy with the rabble of the streets—adopting a squatter's wench as an example of your love for unwashed humanity! By gad, sir, you'll distinguish yourself yet as a subject for the caricaturists of London *Punch* and our ribald newspapers!"

Reuel smiled slightly.

"Well, sir, you choose to be defiant, flippant, insolent! What do you propose to do? Go back to your kennels?"

"I have little idea of returning to Kansas," said the young man soberly. "There's so little I can do. I am a small man to pit myself against the United States government, particularly while they are so busily engaged as patrons of anarchy."

The Senator boiled over again. He paced the floor and shook his clenched fist in his nephew's face.

"Have a care for your precious life, sir! Treason is punishable with death. Traitors stretch hemp after they've stretched the truth too far! Have the goodness to leave me—for a time. I'm an old man—my nerves and my arteries are to be considered. I shall rest and calm myself, and I'll see you again—perhaps only once, however."

Reuel withdrew quietly, but without apology. His agitation was of a different quality, but scarcely less violent than that of his uncle. He took a cab to the Reynolds house, and there was comforted in a measure.

"You're such a child, dearest Reuel!" exclaimed Miranda, lightly, playfully caressing his hair, his flushed cheeks, with her fluttering, rose-petal fingers. "Bad boy, you were richly deserving a drubbing, you know, and you're very angry with your good uncle. You shall tell him you're sorry, and the skies will clear."

"But I'm not sorry! It's not a teapot tempest, darling: I've pulled tail feathers out of the national bird, and heaved rocks at the bird cage atop the Capitol. Washington has as good as rejected me already; I'm an outcast, a pariah—and proud of the distinction!

"If I'm troubled, anxious, it's about you, beloved. You're very precious, Miranda, and I grow afraid. One tear, one reproach, and my cherished ideals go aglimmering.

"Beseech me with your eyes and the music of your lips, and Washington becomes Utopia—I fall on my knees and beg corpulent politicians to let me stand an humble lictor by the marble thrones of the august Senate."

"Ah, but you have a gift for wooing the ear, my Romeo," she laughed gayly. "Thank gracious goodness you're home again! The clearer atmosphere will banish your hobgoblins. You're warped by that horrid Kansas. Dear heart, how you have suffered! The frightful storms! The wretched creatures that have preyed upon your sensibilities!

"Let me look at your hand!" she cried suddenly. "It's all white and clean, dear; there's no 'damned spot.' This finger pressed the trigger. How stern and terrible you were! Ah, that I should marry a man who has killed a human creature. Kiss me, dear, before I flee in a panic."

He smiled and kissed her; then he withdrew the guilty hand from her warm clasp.

"If we should never mention it again, darling," he said quietly, "might we not be happier?"

"As you prefer, dear," she agreed. "But you mustn't let that dark deed haunt you in dreams. A generation ago there was scarcely a gentleman in the first society who had not killed his man. It's highly honorable for gentlemen; I think dueling was far superior to the stuffy law courts of our day.

"I know you killed your man fairly, splendidly—the burst of flame, the smoke—*bang!* My dear, you made me a heroine! The girls literally mobbed me; I was quite sought after. I had to show your picture, you know.

"And you have the terrible pistol that did it, haven't you? And I may have it, mayn't I, darling? I've promised to show it—to let them touch it, you know."

"I haven't it now," he said. "Good Lord, the memory is souvenir enough! Have you ever seen a dead man, Miranda?"

"Urrrr—you make me shudder, Reuel! No, I haven't, and I don't want to see one, but you shall tell me how they look. And that darling, wild little picturesque Hetty of yours, she can fire a gun! Have you her picture?

"You have been so dear about her! And so fun-ny! I'm marrying a Puritan. Pages and pages about Hetty—confession purifies the soul! I tried to read between the lines—the little things you didn't write.

"You never owned to kissing her, Reuel—and she could never be as nice to kiss as I. You vowed a thousand times she wasn't really pretty—but there are those dark, fascinating, passionate little things. You'll never see her or kiss her again, will you?"

"Good Lord!" he cried, and sprang to his feet.

"Reuel! You bear! You scare me so. What have I done? What have I said?"

"How little you know me!" he murmured gravely, dropping into his chair again. "Do you fancy a philanderer, then, Miranda? I have kept my troth. Does that disappoint you?"

"It must have disappointed Hetty!" she whispered mischievously, and burst into a fit of giggling.

"But you're very, very darling, Reuel!" she said quickly. "I believe you're quite, quite unsophisticated, for all your traveling and everything. I've been chaperoned and shielded, and my novels have been selected for me, but I know quite a deal about the wicked world, dear.

"You'd never dream what tales we hear over the teacups. I'll tell you a perfectly astounding secret, darling: *all men are wicked!* They can't be men and escape it. It's—er—original sin, that's it!

"I could tell you the name of a very great and noble and honorable gentleman in Washington—one whom you know quite well—who's in one of the highest positions in the government, and *he*, my dear, is compared with the Sultan of Turkey. You'd never guess it!"

"Miranda!" he protested, with a grimace of pain.

"I fancy you think you're fooling me," she said archly. "I dare say you are much wiser than you'd have me think you. Women tell me that the more wildly jealous a woman is of her husband, the more passionately she adores him."

"You'd have me a Byron?" he queried icily.

"But all the ladies would have died for him!" she cried. "But, Reuel, you're very cross with me. I think it's rather nice not to be too ignorant—too innocent. Women are very, very good and virtuous, as a rule; it's the men who are wicked. But the women forgive them, for it's always been done."

"I'd like you to leave Washington," he said abruptly. "You'd learn many things by travel, Miranda."

"Of course—and we shall go to

London, and Berlin, and Paris, and Petersburg, and—"

"I doubt it! There are other places for travel and observation. I'd like to show you the plain and honest people — people to whom you could not say that all men are wicked. There are thousands of men who would prefer death to infidelity—thousands of women, wives and mothers, who would cast those words in your teeth, Miranda, knowing that you told a hideous lie."

She clapped her little lace kerchief to her eyes and began to sob.

"You hate me, Reuel!" she wailed. "You show it in your awful eyes. You think *I'm* wicked!"

"Forgive me, dearest!" he cried, taking her in his arms. "I am a brute! You're nothing but a baby; you don't know what you've been saying—any more than poor poll parrot, who babbles every idle word that she hears.

"Come, now, dry your eyes. We shall go for a walk in the sunshine. I shall tell you about the baker's dozen of fine ladies that we had in Lawrence, all living in funny little houses—some in log cabins, but all so very anxious about the London and Paris fashions.

"On the Sabbath in Lawrence there's a great parade of fashion, and they have their silks and satins, their poplins and bombazines—and life is—the same old life, as everywhere."

CHAPTER XVI.

NONE SO BLIND.

IT surprised Reuel to note how well-known he was in Washington. While promenading with Miranda his hand was perpetually at the brim of his tall hat, doffing it to belles and beaux, exchanging greetings with cabinet ministers and legislators, society dandies, and various hangers-on of the complex official life of the republic's capital.

There were embarrassing moments for him, too: lovely ladies with whom he had danced a score of times, or promenaded at Jullien's concerts in the National Theater, stared at him with chins in air, and cut him with cruel glances.

They were the wives and daughters of Southern officials and legislators who had imbibed deeply of sectional prejudice since the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and it was evident enough that they knew of his bickerings on the border and classed him with the incendiary, Charles Sumner, and the agitators of the rising tide of small parties — the Free-Soil Democrats, Liberty Whigs, Republicans, and whatnot—that was shaking the Democratic party to its foundations.

Through the fashionable afternoon throng moved a tall and gallantly formed young gentleman dressed in the style of the living minute, and Reuel was staggered at recognizing Mark Rynders.

Miranda averted her head, but the unabashed gallant caught Reuel's eye and raised his beaver in a flourishing salute. Reuel met his insolent smile with a level glance of withering scorn, and the dandy laughed aloud as they swept past each other, their elbows almost touching.

"The intolerable cad!" exclaimed Miranda. "I wonder greatly that I ever permitted him in our drawing-room. He knew quite well that I would decline to recognize him."

Reuel did not choose to tell her that at his last meeting with the man, a noose had encircled his own neck, while Rynders had acted as assistant master of ceremonies.

That night there was a reception at the White House for some South American notables, and Representative Reynolds courteously invited Reuel to accompany him and Miranda.

The young man demurred, frankly explaining that he had conceived a distaste for the present administration in general. Mr. Reynolds was pained,

and Miranda became at once tearful and reproachful.

Her father reminded his prospective son-in-law that the society people in their circle of acquaintances would remark upon the odd circumstance if they saw them in so important an assemblage unaccompanied by Miranda's *fiancé*. The incident was becoming magnified out of proportion, and Reuel surrendered.

The three were driven to the executive mansion in the Congressman's handsome coach, drawn by high-stepping dapple grays. The scene under the gas lamps at the entrance was spectacular, and the vivid contrast brought quickly to Reuel's mind pictures of the somber squalor of the Kansas settlements.

The foreign diplomats glittered in sumptuous uniforms, loaded with jeweled orders and decorations. Their ladies and those of the American officials vied with one another in extravagance of costume and toilette. Ermine and sable covered gem-studded satin, and priceless tiaras and miniature coronets surmounted the handiwork of imported Paris coiffeurs.

In Kansas, reflected the young man bitterly, people were freezing to death for want of fuel and clothing dying for lack of nourishing food — people who journeyed westward to accept the government's proffered bounty and extend the boundaries of the republic.

He found himself presently in the small parlor where the President and his lady were receiving, just off the large and sumptuous Green Room. His Excellency was in a gracious mood, and made a prepossessing picture with his comely face, his slender military form and carriage, and the easy grace of his bearing.

It was noted, however, by a number of the bystanders, that the affable smile vanished when Senator John Hale, of New Hampshire, the President's own State, entered the room with his family.

Hale was popular with everybody in Washington save his colleagues among the fire-eating Southern agitators, and it was known that the President resented the militant abolitionist tactics adopted by the influential New Hampshire orator at the very time when the administration most needed the favor of the Southern clans.

Mrs. Hale and her daughter preceded the Senator in the line that filed past the President and Mrs. Pierce, and they were cordially greeted and favored with a few casual remarks.

Then, as the ladies moved on, Senator Hale smiled, stepped forward with a courtly bow, and extended his hand. But the President saw neither the hand nor the man behind it; he deliberately turned his back on the guest, and fell to chatting with some members of his suite.

Mr. Hale flushed vividly, bowed to Mrs. Pierce, and passed on without a word.

"The cad!" gasped Reuel, his eyes flashing with hot anger.

"Hush, hush!" whispered Mr. Reynolds nervously. "Be not amazed at anything, my boy, in the political arena in times of stress."

Presently District Marshal Hoover called out the names of Representative Reynolds and his daughter, adding the name of their guest.

Miranda gracefully dropped a curtsy and received a winsome smile from the first lady and a compliment from his Excellency. Mr. Reynolds was greeted cordially as he moved past.

Reuel, his face still flushed and his lips set in a straight line, stepped out of the file, fell back a pace, and executed a formal bow, his white-gloved hand placed on his breast.

"The nephew of Senator Tristram!" exclaimed the President cordially, and thrust his hand out with more than ordinary heartiness.

Reuel bowed again, and the hand remained insistently extended.

"Mr. President," said the young

man huskily in a low tone, "I, too, am a New England Yankee, and my conscience will not permit me to clasp the hand that has withheld justice and mercy from the people of Kansas, while showering favors on their villainous foes."

He passed on swiftly, and no more than three bystanders heard his speech, but other guests saw the executive's face grow pale, then turn an angry crimson.

No more than three bystanders heard the speech; yet it was reported in detail to the farthest corners of the White House before the audacious young man was clear of the room.

It was whispered to Congressman Reynolds, and his handsome round face went white, then settled into deep lines of positive anguish.

"Come, we must go at once," he said hoarsely to his daughter, and nodded coldly to Reuel, indicating that he was expected to accompany them back to the house.

As they went out to their coach, Mark Rynders suddenly intercepted them.

"The President of the United States is inhibited by his exalted rank and position from publicly resenting a public insult," he said in a loud voice. "Permit a humble citizen to act in his Excellency's behalf."

On the last word, he took another step forward, and flicked his gloves sharply across Reuel's face.

"Friends of mine will be at the service of your friends, Mr. Tristram," he added, in the grand manner.

Miranda uttered a startled cry and caught at her father's arm.

Reuel drew back and was silent for a moment, apparently mastering his emotions by an unusual effort of will.

Then he spoke firmly.

"I could not ask friends of mine to hold intercourse with friends of yours," he said. "If you are so disposed I cannot prevent you from attacking me in the street or any other place, and I'll defend myself. But I cannot discuss matters of personal honor with a man who has no honor—with a bushwhacker, a border ruffian, a scoundrel!"

Rynders ripped out a curse and started forward, but three young men darted from the crowd that had formed in a moment, seized the enraged swashbuckler, and bore him away.

Reuel turned to Miranda and her father and made a ceremonious bow, indicating that he would take leave of them and walk to his home.

"Nay, it is my wish that you accompany us, Tristram," said the Congressman. "I have somewhat to say to you on a matter that brooks no delay. It is my wish, too, that your uncle may be a witness to our conversation."

As they entered the coach, Reynolds instructed the footman to have the driver proceed to the residence of Senator Tristram.

Miranda began to weep softly. The two men were silent during the short drive.

The Senator was at home, but he received the visitors in his study, attired in a dressing gown, and explained that he was slightly indisposed.

It had all the appearance of a drumhead court-martial.

Miranda wept copiously.

The judge-advocate, in the person of Congressman Reynolds, presented the charges forcefully, with all the artful eloquence of a long experience in dialectics.

The Senator became distressingly faint and ill, and sent for a decanter of brandy. When some color returned to his cheeks, he spoke.

"I resign my seat in the United States Senate to-morrow," he said, "thereby terminating an honorable career of thirty years. The noblemen and elder statesmen of some of the Oriental countries have, I am told, a more violent method of expressing deep shame and unutterable despair.

"There is nothing that you can, with honor, say for yourself, Reuel Tristram, but — do you desire to speak?"

"My only regret is," said Reuel, "that my deep convictions forced me to cause embarrassment to my friends. For the action itself, I make no apology. I should do the same if the situation were presented to me again."

"His father!" gasped the Senator, panting for breath. "His father, my own brother, was what biologists term a 'sport'; some unfortunate throwback on our race. It happens in the noblest families; it's a phenomenon recognized by science."

"My father should not be held responsible," objected the young man. "My fault, as you see it, lies in my practice of looking at things as they are, and expressing my honest convictions freely, without submitting them for censorship to a corrupt, a venal, a villainous political system which is making this republic the laughing stock of the nations and the tragedy of the ages."

Mr. Reynolds was scarlet with rage.

"They are hanging these fanatics to the trees in the West and the South!" he exclaimed. "With a spread of the madness, the practice will become general."

"The worms that turned have always been called fanatics," Reuel replied. "I claim no gift of prophecy, but it's my belief that even you men who are older than I will see the people of George Washington's country pitted against one another—even while that country is still young.

"I came East in a mood of utter despair, but in the White House this evening I somehow took new hope. I saw the handwriting on the wall, I discovered the thinness of the tinsel and the brittle crust of our shoddy aristocracy. Vast changes are coming, because the soul of man rises in times of storm and stress and triumphs over the forces of evil.

"There are wise men emerging from the masses of the oppressed. Abe Lincoln, of Ohio, has dared to warn the country of the pit that yawns for it. Only lately he said: '*Our republican robe is soiled and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit if not the blood of the Revolution.*'"

"A demagogue!" snorted Reynolds contemptuously.

"He may be one of our saviors," said Reuel, "if he is not eliminated by your system of legalized assassination."

"The men who are building Kansas," said Reynolds gruffly, "you call ruffians and assassins. Your friends, the off-scourings of Yankee New England, who are vainly trying to hog a territory to satisfy their Yankee greed, they are patriots and valiant heroes. Three days ago, an able man, an esteemed public official, was shot down in the streets of Lawrence by one of your Yankee heroes."

"Who was it?" cried Reuel eagerly.

"The sheriff of Douglas County—Samuel Jones. He was dangerously wounded, and his condition was reported as critical."

An almost beatific light crept into Reuel's eyes.

"He was warned," he said, as if to himself. "He richly deserved such treatment. I thank you for the information. I must return to Kansas. If Sheriff Jones was shot, the fat's in the fire. It means war, and my friends need me."

Senator Tristram made a horrible strangling sound in his throat, gulped down some brandy, and leaned on the table, breathing heavily.

Miranda, sobbing, darted across the room and threw herself on her knees beside Reuel, clasping his hands tightly.

"I still love you, dear Reuel!" she cried distractedly. "I love you, in spite of all your madness, all your horrid conduct. Come back to us, Reuel,

and be the noble, honest boy you were! Crawl on your knees to this noble old man who has loved you as a son. He'll forgive you, dear.

"Be humble; beg forgiveness! Your old friends will help you to redeem your honor and your good name. I'll stand by you, dear; my father will stand by you."

"I'd extend the helping hand to the lowest wretch from the gutter, if I believed him sincerely humble and repentant," said Reynolds, "and that's the duty of every Christian man."

"Miranda," said Reuel, staring into the girl's streaming eyes, "can you say all that, with such apparent feeling, and understand what you are saying? Do you believe in your young heart that I need forgiveness? Do you see, through such clear eyes, men like your father and my uncle as virtuous, honest men?

"Why, by my soul!" he cried, "if I stood before a higher tribunal than we have upon this miserable earth, I'd plead to the Highest Judge for forgiveness for these two old men, steeped in infamy, corruption, and sin. And *you* think them noble—God help you!"

"Out of my house, maniac!" shrieked the Senator, rising with such violence that the table was overturned with a crash.

"Yes, out of this house!" seconded Reynolds. "And stay out of the houses of all worthy men, you cur!"

"Reuel!" cried the girl again. "You're utterly insane. It's not too late. Come to yourself. Look about you, my dear. See our homes, our dear families, our culture and refinement. Think of our good deeds, our charities! We are the superior people; you must see that!

"What has turned you to those wretches in the border towns? They're ignorant, depraved; they have no culture or understanding of the finer things! Let them fight as they will among themselves till they're all exterminated. A hundred such lives are not worth the life of one gentleman such as you were six months ago. Listen to me, Reuel!"

"I listen," he said, "and my blood congeals! Because you *do* mean what you say. You—a child, are so warped by your environment that you see vice as virtue, falsehood as truth, corruption as purity. God bless you and help you, Miranda. I have to say good-by; I have to go, out into the air where I can breathe."

Reynolds stepped forward and raised his daughter to her feet. He pulled the diamond ring from her finger roughly, angrily.

"Take it," he said to Reuel, "and go. Go at once; your uncle is ill!"

"Yes, take it!" echoed Miranda, suddenly adopting something of her father's manner. "There's no hope. You're too changed; you couldn't be the same again. You'd better go back to your ragged, wretched friends and live with them in their sties."

He sighed deeply, looked at the sparkling jewel, and tossed it into the fire in the grate.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD.

AT sunrise on the 21st of May, 1856, the organized and armed invasion of Lawrence was begun. Marching as the posse of United States Marshal Donaldson, to serve writs of the Federal Court on the town and some of its citizens, seven hundred and fifty men appeared on the heights of Mount Oread and viewed the town that they had come to capture and lay in ruins.

Men from the Carolinas, from Georgia, Virginia, and Alabama were there, augmenting the veteran border ruffians from Missouri. Sabers and rifle barrels and bayonets flashed in the sunlight, and pieces of light artillery were trundled into places of vantage on the

various elevations that commanded the sweep of the town.

No guards challenged the enemy, as on that other day in December. The town appeared tranquil. Merchants opened their shops, and workmen passed through the streets on their way to their tasks.

In the invaders' first glimpse of the doomed city, they experienced a subtle sense of defeat. No force was there to offer battle to those who came prepared for battle. The warriors in their disappointment were moved to conceal their embarrassment with ribald gayety.

Bands played on the heights, and the soldiers sang songs and passed the flowing bowl about to cheer lagging spirits. As a preliminary to more formal action, they seized and plundered the residence of General Robinson on Mount Oread, then declared it the headquarters of the army.

During this early bustle and confusion, a bewildered young man rode into town alone, unchallenged and unnoticed. He had ridden hard all night, and his horse was lathered and legweary.

Permitting the horse to walk, he explored the still quiet streets, looking for a familiar face, but to find one he presently visited the hotel and asked for Hubert Dawson.

The two men embraced like brothers reunited after long separation, then hurried to the roof of the building to view the martial array on the heights.

"Tell me what it means, Hubert!" cried Reuel. "I've been traveling; I've been in New England, closing up certain affairs of mine there. On my way West I heard some rumors of the new war, the threatened invasion, and I came as fast as boats and horses would bring me. But what *is* all this? A celebration—a dress parade!"

"I don't understand it rightly myself," Hubert confessed. "They tell me that it's the new policy of non-resistance. General Robinson ordered it. There's to be nothing but submission; no fighting, no hitting back. It's too much for my thick head, but the wise fellers say that we must show Washington what's what by letting the bushwhackers have their way until anarchy has sealed its own doom."

"I came all the way—I've ridden hard to get here, to be with you in the last stand," Reuel informed him. "Perhaps Robinson and his friends are right, but I can't believe that these border ruffians will be softened by an offering of olive branches."

"There's more to it than I can get around," said Hubert. "It seems like we've been slandered in New England. Some say we're as bad as the proslavery fellers, and all the folks in Kansas are fighting to kill each other off. Robinson and Pomeroy say we'll quit fighting, and let 'em see how sweet and lovin' all the neighbors will be when they come over from Missouri."

"Where is Hetty?" Reuel asked abruptly.

"Out to the farm with Mrs. Roberts. Luther took a farm this spring. Hetty's getting well, now. She had a relapse that day when her old man raised such ructions, but she's better now."

"What did you do with Eustace?"

"I guess it comes nearer to what he did with me," said Hubert sheepishly. "I staked that crazy coot to go out the Oregon trail. I had a little money, and I didn't want the women folks to suffer on the way. They said they'd send for Hetty when she was well. They—they forgave 'er, they said.

"I certainly do hope no harm comes to them women," he added thoughtfully, "but they do say the Injuns have been acting mean on the Western trails this spring. They went out with a big train, though, so I reckon it 'll be all right. Most comfortin' thought is, that Eustace prob'ly never will earn enough money to get back this way. I don't mind not getting my money back."

"Look! They're starting to move down the hill," said Reuel, pointing to the troops. "There's a cannon trained this way, and we might be more comfortable down below."

At eleven o'clock Marshal Donaldson sent Deputy Marshal Fain into the town with writs for Judge Smith and G. W. Dietzler, both charged with treason, in that they had resisted the authority of the border ruffians commissioned in the fall by Governor Shannon as enforcers of law and order.

The two citizens yielded to arrest peaceably, and Marshal Donaldson formally dismissed the posse of seven hundred and fifty, thanking them for their efficient service, and turning them over to the sheriff of the county, Mr. Samuel Jones.

Jones, shot down in the streets of Lawrence by a personal enemy, had been reported dying or dead from time to time, and his appearance before the mighty posse came as something akin to a miraculous resurrection.

He sat on his horse with dashing spirit and made a picture of hearty and robust health, and the lusty cheering resounded from the Oread hill to the center of the town.

Under the sheriff's orders the long-planned sacking of the town began. He was armed with writs clumsily executed by the grand jury, declaring the large and new Free State Hotel to be an arsenal for contraband munitions of war, and the two local newspapers dangerous breeders of sedition and local strife.

Jones dined heartily and well at the Free State Hotel, graciously permitted Mr. Eldridge, the proprietor, to remove some of his furniture and personal effects, and then gave the final commands for the destruction of the building.

Cannon were placed in the street and trained on the hotel. Senator Atchison claimed the honor of directing the first shot, and fired it far over the roof. Better gunners trained the pieces and planted a number of solid shot in the walls of the structure.

The shot served only as a bizarre form of mural decoration; the hotel refused to fall. The sheriff grew impatient, and time was saved by the piling of rubbish in the rooms and the firing of the great pyre thus formed.

While the hotel burned, the newspaper plants were sacked and destroyed, presses, type, paper, and all property of the owners being burned or sunk in the river.

The doughty hero of the unusual celebration, Sheriff Jones, addressed his posse as the buildings burned.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is the happiest day of my life, I assure you. I determined to make the fanatics bow before me in the dust, and kiss the territorial laws. I have done it, by Heaven! I have done it!"

As the conflagration burned out, he dismissed the posse, thanking them for their bravery and loyal support.

The spectacle seemed to be at an end, but the formal dismissal was the signal for the sacking of the town.

No man of Lawrence raised a hand in resistance, but the seven hundred and fifty heroes of the day broke ranks and turned the quiet streets to a bedlam of disorder.

Stores and dwellings were broken into, raided, and plundered. Drunken ruffians paraded the streets dressed grotesquely in feminine apparel, shooting the windows from the buildings and singing lewd songs.

Singing the popular song, "Mollie Darling," a group of them leveled rifles at some ladies who had taken refuge on College Hill, and fired a volley. The bullets flew among the women, but the marksmanship was poor, and when the rifles were aimed again, the human targets had fled.

Smoke rose from several quarters of the town, and the marauders, burning and pillaging, began to spread toward the outskirts, seeking further loot and entertainment.

Reuel and Hubert had witnessed the sickening spectacle from a hill, and Reuel seized Hubert's arm as a party of roisterers rode down Massachusetts Avenue about sundown.

"Where is Luther Roberts's farm?" he asked.

"Out five miles," said Hubert. "We'd better go."

They rode down the hill on the side opposite the town, and Hubert led the way into the open country at a smart gallop.

There were no fires along that road, and they encountered no raiding parties, the distance being an objection to merrymakers who found abundant material in easy reach.

The farm was already protected. Roberts and Dr. Vincent were there, with a party of friends and farm laborers, and the two newcomers were received with joyous cheers.

As Reuel dismounted, a cry came from the farmhouse porch.

"Reuel! Reuel!"

Unabashed, he responded to the call, and astonished himself as well as Hetty by seizing the little girl in his arms and holding her close to him.

"I came back, Hetty," he said, "to learn the truth. You loved me, or you hated me. I had to know which."

"The Washington sweetheart?" she gasped breathlessly.

"She sent me away," he said simply. "It was then I knew — that I never loved her as—as I tried *not* to love you from the day I met you."

A great tension was broken, and Hetty wept, heartily and unrestrained.

"Wh—where'll you take me, Reuel?" she sobbed, yielding even her will to him.

"We are Kansans, Hetty," he said solemnly. "Everything is changed for me. Out of my despair have grown a great faith and hope. I've seen Lawrence burn to-day, and the sight has been an inspiration. I can see things now with something of the vision of General Robinson and Luther Roberts.

"To the beacon fire lighted by enemies, greater, braver men will rally to the defense of suffering Kansas. The story of the fall of Lawrence will flash over the world and herald the new day for the West, and the rise of Lawrence from her ashes. There's a new poem this year by Alfred Tennyson; it's called 'Maud'; and some of the words struck home—"

I have felt with my native land,
I am one with my kind,
I embrace the purpose of God,
And the doom assigned.

THE END

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

IN the next issue we begin publication of "Drums of Peace," the latest serial by Joseph Ivers Lawrence—and one of his best. Laid in the stirring days when old Holland struggled for freedom against the hordes of the Spanish conquerors, it is replete with adventure and action, and sparkles with romance.

With three other serial stories in the same issue, this means we shall continue four serials for the next few numbers, as we have in the last three or four. This matter of serials has given us some concern: we want to give you the best possible ARGOSY—to make the magazine as satisfactory to you as possible in every way. The thing we want is to find out what *you* want.

You have had half a dozen issues of the magazine with three serials, now half a dozen returned to the old four-serial policy. Which do you prefer? Speak up and let us know your choice. Here is an advocate of the four-serial policy. Do you agree with him?

Cameron, W. Va.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for over six months now. Just thought I would write and tell you what I thought of the magazine. And I wish you would reprint that story about a giant rocket, that was printed about thirty years ago. I thought "Luckett of the Moon" was fine.

I like the way you publish the magazine now. Having the index separate, serials in one part, novelettes and short stories in the other. But I miss the four serials. I always wait until I get a story complete before I read it. With one starting every week and one ending every week I get to read a complete serial every week. So I wish we could have at least four serials.

I liked "The Hard-Boiled Tenderfoot." It was a fine story. I guess I like them all, though. But wish we could have a few less Western stories and a few good mystery stories. I think the best story I ever read in ARGOSY was "Who *Did* Kill Ezra Klagg?" But you do have a large assortment, and I like them all, so guess I don't have any kick coming. Only for another serial or two.

JAMES E. TOOTHMAN.

PERHAPS you may not agree with all of Mr. Young's points, but he has summed up his opinion of the magazine in good methodical fashion:

Columbus, Ohio.

I am going to try and point out your features and your defects in the following lists, taking up the pleasanter subject first:

Features—

1. Superstories—stories that are above other magazine stories.

2. Variety—ARGOSY doesn't attempt to specialize in any type of story.

3. Readers' Viewpoint—While other magazines have departments like these, they do not show the interest that this one does.

4. Large print—Easy on the eyes.

5. No advertising in the stories, or no "Continued on page ——" This secures uninterrupted reading.

6. Handsomely illustrated covers which attract the eye, and make new fans.

7. The pep and enthusiasm inspired by the editors in guessing contests.

Now for the defects. There are not many, and they are found in other magazines, too.

1. Too much story told in title. In "The Return of George Washington," we all expected his return somehow, but had to wait for the third installment to find it.

2. Short stories too short. Some are only two pages long.

3. Too much ballyhoo about future features. Most of them have not come up to expectations because we thought about a "super-superstory," and only got a superstory.

I have been an ARGOSY fan since introduced two years ago and wish you every success. Am doing my part to pass along the word.

CLIFFORD JACKSON YOUNG.

"Luckett of the Moon," by Slater LaMaster, continues to line up enthusiasts:

Washington, D. C.

I fall within the class of your readers who don't like "true-to-life" stories, but prefer stories that show some use of the imagination and ability to weave out an interesting plot. One story of this nature I enjoyed so much was "Luckett of the Moon." A satisfied reader.

LEONARD M. GARDNER.

La Grange, Ky.

I am a reader of ARGOSY, and having just finished "Luckett of the Moon," wish to say it is one of the best stories I have ever read. It held my interest from the start, the fact being that it was so different from the ordinary run of stories. A. D. BUTTON.

Bridgeport, Conn.

As one of your fans, I think you scored high when you published "Luckett of the Moon," by Slater LaMaster. It was gripping from the start to the finish, and I think was as good as can be had at any price. There is nothing as good as a good thing except more of it. For a dime your magazine sure gives one hundred per cent satisfaction.

LOUIS J. COHN.

If another "Luckett of the Moon" comes from Mr. LaMaster's pen, we'll do our best to pass it along to you.

Favorites—always a favorite topic of conversation. Who is your favorite author? Mr. Schreffler chooses either C. C. Waddell or John Wilstach.

Newark, Ohio.

I started reading ARGOSY last July, beginning with "Desperate Chances," by MacIsaac. I now read practically all of the stories and serials. The ones I have liked best are: "The Return of George Washington," by George Worts; "Under Cover Charges," by John Wilstach; "The Eagle's Brood," by Lieutenant John Hopper; "Luckett of the Moon," by Slater LaMaster; "Let Egbert Do It"; and "Somewhere in Nevada," by C. C. Waddell; and "Your Man or My Girl," by Garret Smith. The two best novelettes were "The Picture Game," by Wilstach, and "Slaves of the Wire," by Garret Smith. The best short so far was "The Publicity Princess," by A. T. Locke. "Blue Steel," by Clay Bridger, is surely fine so far. I am anxious to finish the last two installments.

I cannot agree with most of your other readers that Fred MacIsaac is my favorite. Either C. C. Waddell or John Wilstach would hold that position, I believe. "The Devil's Flower" was good, I think, but rather disconnected. For that reason it is not in the above list. I especially like the "shorts" by John H. Thompson and Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift. The poetry is mostly good.

In closing, I wish to say only one thing more—why can't your authors publish in book form more often? I see that "The Queen of Clubs" is already in between covers. Why not some others? Nearly all are well worth having.

Hoping that ARGOSY stays just as it is.

ROBERT SCHREFFLER.

"Queen of Clubs" was the two hundred and seventeenth serial from ARGOSY-ALLSTORY to be issued in book form—and the list is constantly growing.

It is pleasant to have our editorial judgment praised by your indorsement of the stories ARGOSY brings out, but it is even more gratifying to receive recognition such as this of our efforts to make ARGOSY a clean, wholesome magazine:

Verdun, Mont.

Your magazine, first of all, cannot be praised to the full extent, for its stories are the best and cleanest that money will buy. It was last October, I believe, a friend of mine gave me one, and I read the first installment of "Desperate Chances." After reading that wonderful story I guess you know what happened. I kept on buying it. There's no complaint to make about your stories; they are all good. The other night at the picture show I saw Charles Francis Coe. It showed him with his book, "Me: Gangster." His latest serial, "The Evil Panorama," is one of the finest stories I've read. Here's hoping your magazine great success. D. COOPER.

Railroad stories seem to strike a popular note; at least, here is one reader well satisfied:

Sweetgrass, Mont.

Having knocked around the various railroads a good share of my life, and having been a writer of news and fiction stories for the last eighteen years, I feel that I am somewhat of a critic of railway stories. But if the day ever arrives when I can write a story on a par with Laurance M. Hare's "Special Duty," railroad story, I will surely feel that I have arrived. That is the best story in any class of fiction that I have ever read and wish to congratulate Mr. Hare upon his ability as a writer. All of his railroad stories are grand.

I especially enjoy Ray Cummings' and Ben Conlon's stories.

Have been a reader of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY but a comparatively short time, but I will say, Mr. Editor, that the stories you have been printing since I have been reading the magazine sure have the "pep and the kick" that makes reading a real pleasure, and you are to be highly commended upon securing the stories of so many capable and talented writers.

LEO. J. W. FROSS.

Is ARGOSY a family proposition? Here's a home where they need two copies each week to meet the demand!

Seattle, Wash.

I have been watching patiently for *Mme. Storey* and *Bella* to appear and as I see there are others doing likewise I add my bit to their requests.

My main object was to ask if George Worts

couldn't bring about the "Return of Peter the Brazen" and his adorable wife, who was supposed to have been lost at sea during the war.

Living on the coast, the stories of "Peter the Brazen" were intensely interesting, and I feel sure a new series would meet with public approval, as such an interesting hero really should live a long and useful life.

Have read ARGOSY for over fifteen years and expect to continue for much longer. We get two copies each week to supply the demand at our house. MRS. M. F. WILLIAMS.

So popular with these readers is the work of Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift that they emulate her verse to voice their sentiments:

North Canton, Ohio.

To voice our appreciation of Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift's work, we are offering you the following original poem:

OUR FAVORITE.

Here's to the Lady,
Whose stories I like best;
She's not from the East,
Nor the great Golden West.

She hails from the South,
The Nut-Cracker State.
Her stories are fine,
I think they are great.

They're always so clean
And so nicely told.
Her heroes are handsome;
Also strong, brave and bold.

The poem of her Baby;
I think it was fine.
She sure had me wishing
The youngster was mine.

The first thing I look for
When ARGOSY's pages I flip,
Is something by *Beatrice*
Ashton Vandegrift.

ARGOSY is getting better and better in every way, in every edition.

Here's for continued success.

The Three E's.
WILLIAM B. EVANS.

"Ain't it a grand and glorious feeling?" asks Mr. Hardeman. It does sound "comfy," as he describes it:

Ettricks, Va.

Have been reading your great magazine for several years, yet haven't missed but one copy in twenty months. When I read the readers' knocks and kicks I wonder just how much they want for the price of one chocolate soda.

Haven't passed up but two stories, but don't kick at that, for I see where some people liked them: "The Future Eve" and "Beyond the Stars." But I do admire John Holden, Fred MacIsaac, Ivers Lawrence, Gordon Stiles; in fact, most of them, but give me Charles F. Coe's stories of old Georgia, for I'm a cracker myself. His "Moonglow" and "'Geechee Shad" were unbeatable.

The way I express it is after you have had a hard day at work and nothing has gone right, and come home at night, eat supper, stretch out by a good fire, pick up the old ARGOSY, oh, boy! Ain't it a grand and glorious feeling?

More strength to you.

W. T. HARDEMAN.

Readers are invited to use Argonotes as an information bureau. We are always glad to supply the information desired in a case like this:

Toronto, Canada.

To settle a friendly argument, would you please let me know through the medium of your paper if you published a story named "Without Gloves," by James B. Hendrix? This was, I believe, several years ago. I do not remember whether it was run as a serial or a complete novelette. C. N. MCLEOD.

"Without Gloves" was published as a serial in the ARGOSY, running in the issues of July 14 to August 18, 1923, inclusive.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

7-7

Looking Ahead!

Back to the days of the picturesque musketeers—the romantic days of doublet and hose, of hot blood and ready rapiers!

DRUMS OF PEACE

A New Romantic Serial

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

takes you back to old Holland in the dark days when that little kingdom was bravely battling against the might of all-powerful Spain. To a country youth of courageous old Holland came the opportunity to lead the Royal Musketeers, and achieve rank and fame in the gallant struggle. His story makes a thrilling recital, with adventure and romance at every turn. It will start in the

Issue of July 14th

THE AMATEUR DOCTOR

A Complete Novelette

By LAURANCE M. HARE

is a tale of mystery and medicine—of queer events transpiring within the walls of an insane asylum. It is a story that will "get" you and give you a real thrill.

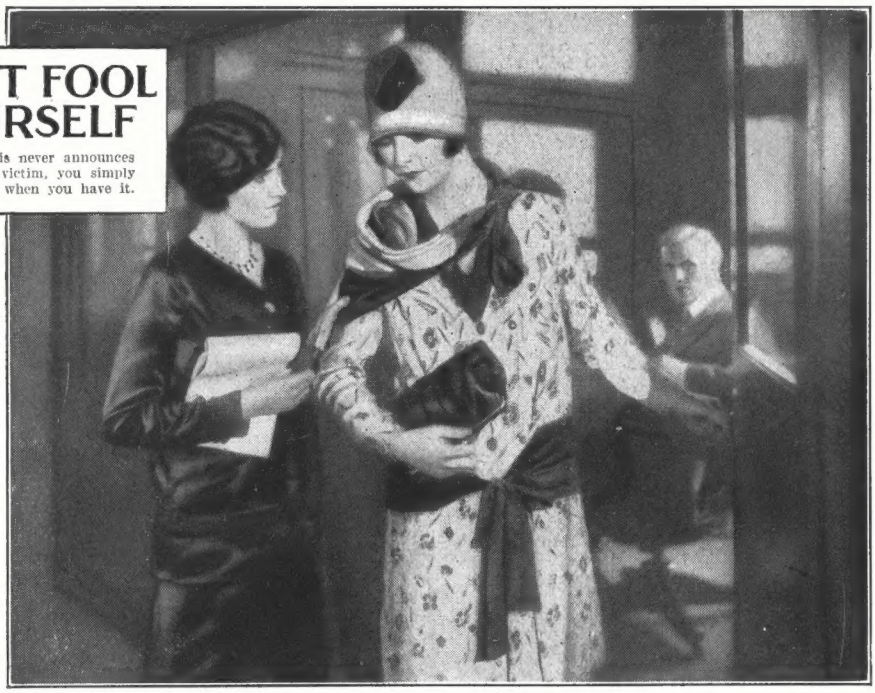
ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

"First In Fiction" ***Out Every Wednesday***

DON'T FOOL YOURSELF

Since halitosis never announces itself to the victim, you simply cannot know when you have it.



Halitosis may get *you discharged*

Employers prefer fastidious people . . . halitoxics not wanted.

MORE and more, employers insist on having about them people who are fastidious. Sooner or later, those with halitosis are "let out."

The true reason for discharge, however, is usually hidden under such phrases as "Inefficient," "You can do better elsewhere," "We need a more experienced person," etc.

Realize these facts about halitosis. That, due to modern habits, it is much more prevalent than is suspected. That it is a definite liability in friendships, affections and business. That you can have it and not know it.

The one means of being sure that you are free from it is to rinse the mouth systematically with Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times when necessary, especially before meeting others. Keep a bottle handy in home and office for this purpose.

Listerine ends halitosis instantly. Being antiseptic, it strikes at its commonest cause —fermentation in the oral cavity. Then, being a powerful deodorant, it destroys the odors themselves.

If you have any doubt of Listerine's powerful deodorant properties, make this test: Rub a slice of onion on your hand. Then apply Listerine clear. Immediately, every trace of onion odor is gone.

With these facts before you, make up your mind to keep yourself on the safe, polite and popular side by using Listerine. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

Have you tried the new Listerine Shaving Cream?

Cools your skin while you shave and keeps it cool afterward. An outstanding shaving cream in every respect.

LISTERINE

The safe antiseptic

HAVE A CAMEL

It's the favorite.

WHEN smoking is recognized as a pleasure, Camel has the call.

© 1928, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem, N. C.